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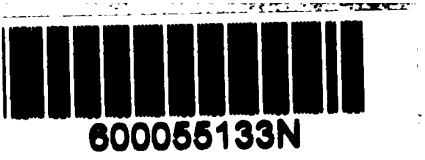
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THE

# *Mysterious Florentine.*

VOL. II.

THE

# *Mysterious Florentine.*

## A Romance,

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY CAROLINE SINCLAIR.

Cast off your veil, mystery;
Show us each ghastly feature;
Pooh! not ghastly—insignificant,
When truth reveals you—such as you are.

VOL. II.

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THE

# *Mysterious Florentine.*

## CHAP. VIII.

THE Castello de Almanza was pleasantly situated at Venice, and at some distance from the casino. Thither the whole party with the utmost speed repaired, and were entertained by their hostess with the utmost hospitality. A crowd of noble Venetians hailed, with the liveliest demonstrations of joy, the return of the donna, and testified by their attention how much she was respected.

Laurentini, engaged, but not happy amid the gay throng, enjoyed the sweetest moments when alone; there, seated in her chamber, the casement of which opened to the grand canal, she would give free indulgence to thought, mark the soft ebbing of the water, and wish her bosom were as calm. Montaldi, the object of her fond solicitude, perhaps an houseless wanderer, craving that pity he knew so well how to bestow! This was too much, the idea too full of anguish to be cherished, and the welcome interruption of Rosalia called off her attention.

The conversation of that lively girl produced the most salutary effect; not to check her vivacity, Laurentini constrained herself to appear cheerful; her assumed spirits deceived all, and Alonzo most, who fondly flattered himself the auspicious hour would yet arrive when

the beloved object of his affection, no longer reluctant, would reward his constancy with her hand.

Elvira, who sincerely loved her brother, encouraged him to cherish this delusive hope, partially construing the alteration of Laurentini into acquiescence.

"The senora," said she, one day to her brother, "loves you, I am persuaded, though she chuses to trifle."

Alonzo delighted, interrogated her with earnestness:

"Had Laurentini given her any reason to draw so favorable a conclusion?"

"None other," Elvira replied, "save that she mentions your name more frequent, and hears you spoken of with less frigidity; besides, when I told her

you was unhappy, she sighed profoundly."

The countenance of Alonzo brightened, for like his sister, he did not reflect that compassion as well as love, may excite a sigh. It was to the former, the one that heaved the susceptible bosom of Laurentini owed its origin.

No stranger to the merit of Alonzo, she lamented that his affections should be ill bestowed; she would have softened by sympathy the pang of unrequited love; but if he, in spite of reason, cherished hope, was she to blame?

Gay and volatile, the bosom of De Almanza was invulnerable to despair; though the gloom of disappointment would occasionally cloud his brow, and cast a damp on his pleasure, yet the momentary sensation was immediately

succeeded by the smile of gaiety; and though deep the impression made on his heart by Laurentini, his spirits were too light to become depressed.

A pleasing addition was made to this agreeable circle by the arrival of Don Rameraz and his daughter, the Signora Agatha.

Rameraz was an old warrior who had distinguished himself by his singular bravery in the Spanish service, and had been by that grateful nation, created a grandee of Spain, and knight of the Golden Fleece; but his proudest boast was the virtues and accomplishments of his Agatha.

"These," exclaimed the veteran, "are trophies worth contending for! these the heart's best shield against the attack of every assailant!"

Rameraz had outlived all his relations, and now spent a cheerful old age in the society of his friends, where the tumult of war was forgot amid the peaceful calm of domestic life. Agatha, the only surviving child out of six, consoled him for the loss of the rest, as well as for the death of her mother.

Blessed with a disposition capable of receiving and conferring happiness, Rameraz suffered not recollection to cloud his present felicity, nor yielded to the weakness of complaint; when he was serious it was not the gloom of severity, it was merely the pause of reflection, for there were intervals when he loved to retrace scenes of former joy, but he gave not way to unbecoming sorrow, it was the dignified regret of a well regulated mind.

Agatha, at an age when the bosom

vibrates to the sound of pleasure, and the feelings unrestrained by experience, find spontaneous vent, was deprived of the prudent council of a mother; it is true she had the best instruction, but how unlike the tender maternal voice is the dissembled language of cold interest. Agatha however felt not the deprivation, for Rameraz knew how to blend indulgence with restraint, so that the freedom of the one submitted willingly to the correction of the other, and produced that uniformity of happiness which banishes from the bosom of its possessor the sigh of discontent. He clogged not with suspicion the ardour of youthful expectation, nor sought to damp its energies by the voice of evil anticipation. That voice which proclaims to the self-deceived object, 'Your imaginary bliss is unreal,' and blights the fair buds before they blossom. He suffered the strength of maturity to repel

the blow, and when he spoke of his misfortunes, it was to check the impetuous sally, not to create the gloom of despair. Happy in himself, and happy in his Agatha, the good old warrior reaped with pleasure the well-earned fruits of his parental labour.

Educated at the same convent, Elvira and Agatha had contracted for each other a friendship of the most tender nature. Hardly ever separate, it had been thought (perhaps wished) that a relative tie would add a stronger cement, if possible, to their attachment, for Alonzo seemingly viewed Agatha with the eyes of partiality, nor was he, as it appeared from concurring circumstances, wholly indifferent to her; but the marked attention he paid Laurentini evinced a decided preference that left no room for doubt; he nevertheless admired Agatha—even could have loved

her, but for the superior attractions of the senora. Wilfully blinded, he would not resign his pretentions, though hourly convinced of their fallacy.

The thoughts of Laurentini continually reverted to the same object, whether sequestered in the solitude of her chamber, or surrounded by her cheerful companions, Montaldi alone engrossed her attention; when leaning on the arm of Elvira, she would tread the smooth lawn, inhale the fragrant freeze, and mark the pastime of the happy peasants, it was but to draw a comparison; some fond association, some striking contrast brought Vincent to her recollection.

She beheld a shepherd with anxious gaze watching the step of some disdainful maid, whose averted look bespoke the refusal as yet unrevealed.

She sighed, "Alas! poor rustic!" and hurried on. Yet this was but exchanging one scene for another.

Arrived at the steps of Saint Mark's Place, she watched the sailing of the gondolas. What an assemblage of people! She attentively surveyed their countenances—some with aspect clouded, indicating inward anxiety; others whose affected serenity, like the deceitful ocean, concealed the approaching storm.

Dissatisfied, she mingled with the promiscuous group that were walking in the grand square of Saint Mark, attempted to partake of their amusement, and tolerably collected, found a temporary suspension from pain

Convinced that there is no state, however elevated or obscure, beyond the reach of care—it is the constant attend-

ant of humanity—remove the individual where you will, change of scene cannot dislodge the troublesome guest, neither can difference of station divert the pang, though circumstance may lessen or augmen it.

The soft insinuating manners of Agatha imperceptibly won her heart, and in her engaging company, she spent many a pleasant hour, while the unwearied assiduity of her considerate hostess left her not an unemployed moment.

Some involvement of gaiety, some interesting party, or favourite amusement, successfully, and almost continually engaged the pursuit of Laurentini, and she became a willing partaker of the diversion selected for her by a friendship the most zealous.

No appearance of design betrayed the generous artifice of the amiable donna; acquainted with the secret melancholy of her guest, she tenderly sought to remove it, not by a troublesome officiousness, but that delicate attention so soothing to a mind of sensibility. Her actions seemingly uninfluenced, were more than ever restrained, but then it was by the pleasing task of requiting the kindness she so sensibly felt.

Alonzo, with anxious solicitude, watched each turn of her countenance, and marked each variation, either with the most animating hope, or the severest disappointment.

Not in the least discouraged by the uniform reserve she maintained toward him, he continued persecuting the unhappy Laurentini, and interrupted the tranquillity she but for him had enjoyed.

Her peace of mind seemed for ever fled, and yet she could not hate the object that had invaded it; when she even strove to forget him, her heart, refractory, repulsed the idea. Montaldi was worthy of her esteem; he was an injured, but not guilty being. These were the fond whisperings of imagination—these the flattering hopes that beguiled her sorrow, and rendered uncertainty endurable.

At times, yielding to the darkest despair, she would fancy the mysterious Florentine some low-born, obscure individual, lament the distance fate had placed between them, and for his sake, wish her station less elevated.

"The joy had been mine of imparting happiness to a noble heart. Lowly and humble, I had preserved that even tenor which escapes the envenomed shaft of

care, unburthened by pomp and splendour that cheers the happy, but mocks the mourner's grief, and gilds the abode of misery, yet cannot render its possessor invulnerable to sorrow."

With an emphatic pause, she directed her eyes toward the Campanile. The lofty steeple claimed her attention, and she broke into the following soliloquy:

"Not less glittering were my prospects as late yon fair sun of hope smiled on my days, but now the horizon's obscured—a cheerless gloom prevails. Like that high steeple, on whose gilt tiles the rays of light are shed, elevation makes but my anguish the more conspicuous; my towering hopes receive the levelling blow that falls unheeded on the unaspiring. And yet is there a state exempt from pain? For whether our wants are many or few,

and we are restrained in them, is not our deprivation the same ?"

She walked on a few paces, and passed the church of Saint Mark.

Her bosom heaved, while mentally she exclaimed, " Ye sacred spot of devotion, within whose holy walls religion rears her peaceful head, canst thou afford sanctuary to a being forlorn like me ?"

Her thoughts recurred to the calm quiet of a monastic life, as the only means whereby she could enjoy the repose she despaired of ever regaining.

Full of meditation, she left Saint Mark's Place, and returned to the castello.

## CHAP. IX.

The night was far advanced, and all the inhabitants of the Castello di Viralva fast locked in the arms of sleep, save the gloomy marchese.

With the perturbation peculiar to a guilty mind, he paced his lofty chamber. His steps were broken and irregular—now pausing with dismal thought, or actuated by the impulse of fear.

Startled at the least noise, he listened to the sound of his own footsteps, and

as they echoed, timidly cast his eyes around the room.

Carelessly throwing himself on a chair, he looked at his watch. "'Tis not yet the hour," said he, silently apostrophizing; "why this unusual trepidation, have I aught to fear? Powerless and unfriended, he is completely in my power, and shall I not use it? Had I no other motive, my own security would influence me to act with resolution. 'Tis done, the task performed, and I am safe.—What of the babblers?" exclaimed he, starting from his seat. "Gold can silence them, bind them my slaves, and insure subservience to my will. Yes, Manfredoni, your insolence too, I will restrain—convert that haughty look of defiance into the abject glance of mean submission; nor Almeria's wrongs, nor wounded pride shall license that tongue per force made silent.

He re-trimmed a lamp that burnt on the table, and hastily left his chamber.

By a secret communication, he reached a narrow flight of stairs. These he descended with alacrity; they conducted him to a suit of private rooms, in one of which Theodore awaited his approach.

The ruffian rose at his entrance.

"Is the captive safe?" enquired the impatient Viralva.

"No, Senor Marchese—he is not arrived; neither can I tell why Orlando and Velasquez tarry so long."

The brows of Altidore became contracted, and folding his arms, he awaited the result.

No sound broke on their silence,

save the low murmurs of the wind. Viralva chid the slow progress of time, and thought the tedious watch insupportable. Anxiety ruffled his speaking countenance, and added fierceness to his eye; each fine and manly feature became distorted as the varying passions raised a conflict.

At length the cheerful dawn disturbed his meditation.

"Thus have I passed the livelong night," said he, with an ironical smile.

Theodore awed to silence through fear, now ventured to reply. He, like the marchese, was lost in conjecture—some mishap had perhaps befel his comrades.

"Torment me not with your idle fears," said Viralva, too much irritated

at the idea, even to give it a thought. Theodore would have attempted to sooth him, but fearful of incurring displeasure he spoke not.

"Go bring me tidings of the loiterers," said Altidore with affected composure.

He wished not his feelings to betray themselves; they were of the most discordant nature. Had his destined victim escaped him? Fear makes a coward of the brave. This Viralva painfully acknowledged, while he attempted to reason himself out of all apprehension; but the effort was vain, and the pang of compunction wrung from him an ingenuous confession.

"Oh, say, thou undefinable sensation! thou something within; whence springs your origin—is it from guilt? If so, it

were folly to do ill. Recollection mars enjoyment, and fills us with the care of the miser. In possession of a treasure it affords no satisfaction; we dare not partake, lest some one should snatch it from us. Did the sting of remorse attend an act before perpetration, how many would escape the unavailing regret which now torments me."

He heard approaching footsteps; he listened; it was him. A sound familiar reached his ear; he opened the door, and advanced to meet them, but hastily turned back.

"Coward that I am," said he, reproaching himself. "I behold the completion of my scheme, and cannot rejoice—the sight unmans me."

So saying, with the utmost speed he reached his chamber, and giving way to

an involuntary emotion, was surprised by Theodore, in an attitude of the deepest dejection. His arms were crossed, and his eyes fixed in melancholy gaze.

" I bring my lord good news," said that vile agent, with an air of feigned respect, that pleased the haughty marchese.

" Speak, my good fellow, have they succeeded ?"

" Yes, senor, to your utmost wishes. Orlando conveyed him to the appointed place; he and Velasquez waits your pleasure."

" Did he complain ?"

" No, Senor Marchese, sighs were his only language, and looks of scorn the entreaty he used."

" Provoking indifference," replied Viralva, " but I'll subdue that stubborn spirit — crush the strong mind, too proud to sue. But go, Theodore, I'll not detain you. Tell your comrades they have done well, and shall not be forgot."

Well pleased at his dismissal, Theodore departed, and Altidore alone, in vain endeavoured to recompose himself. He shuddered without knowing the reason; it was perhaps the silence of the solitary hour. Would it were later—vain wish! In crowds that single thought had pursued him, had reminded him of what he was, and divested pleasure of every charm.

The pomp and magnificence that surrounded him but mocked his grief; and to obtain tranquillity he would willingly

have exchanged the stately castello for the humble cot of the meanest peasant.

He envied the hardy sons of labour, and wondered at that energy, that elasticity of spirit, which enabled them with pleasure to renew their daily toil, unmixed with lassitude. He beheld them cheerfully pursue their avocations, or relax the sternest features with a smile, as some favourite object—some tender idea soothed to softness the aspect naturally rugged.

He beheld a herdsman collecting his cattle; the very animals with dumb gratitude came to his welcome call. "How powerfully doth tenderness operate," thought he inwardly. "That man doubtless is kind to these poor creatures, they bound at his voice—even quit the pasture to obey. Instructive lesson, I

will profit by thee, nor longer live selfishly! But each individual has some object; where shall I find one?"

Rosalia, as the most desirable presented herself, but she was affianced to another; this no impediment to Viralva—the greater the conquest. And now the counterfeited pleasure he felt at her restoration, gave place to unbounded rage. Many difficulties arose to obstruct his way—Ernesto might guard more securely his treasure, and prevent the accomplishment of his design.

The friendship he feigned gave him many favourable opportunities of prying into their domestic concerns; but what he observed filled him with increased mortification. He discovered that the duca's vassals preferred fidelity to the most glittering temptation, and served their lord more from inclination than

submission. Submission, that may restrain hatred, but cannot command love, for though fear may stifle the concealed flame, circumstance or accidental power kindles it into a blaze that burns with additional fury for being smothered.

Those of the Senor di Bartolo, though few, boasted of equal integrity. The whole must then depend on himself.

Ernesto, whose impatience became increased by delay, longed most ardently for the return of Rosalia—a return now doubtful, for Laurentini derived so much satisfaction from the society she enjoyed at the Castello di Almansa, that they seemed loth to remove her.

Heavy passed the lingering hours, and each moment appeared an age to him. The anxious fears of a lover filled him with a thousand doubts; and with

all the timidity of true love, he trembled lest any unforeseen event should deprive him of her he valued more than life.

Might not some rival intervene, and snatch from him his promised bliss? But he relied on the unalterable attachment of Rosalia—she was incapable of change.

Then would he seek the venerable senor—engage him on a theme so tender, till the bright moon shed her light rays on their converse, and warned them it was time to conclude. Reluctant, Almerini obeyed the hint, and sought the forest's pensive shade, there to indulge the fancies of a glowing imagination.

In one of these nocturnal excursions the ears of Ernesto were assailed by a low moaning noise. Ever ready to afford assistance to the unfortunate, this

claim on his humanity was instantly complied with. Mending his pace, he pursued the sound, which at every step became fainter, and at length gradually died away.

Discovering his mistake, for he had taken the wrong direction, he endeavoured to retrieve his error. The silver rays of the moon shewed him the path he had inadvertently mistook. The moans had subsided, and the voice of some person apparently soothing another, informed Almerini that his assistance was required. He addressed the strangers, but received no answer; probably from the distance.

Grieved that his efforts were so unsuccessful, Ernesto knew not how to determine.

The most solemn silence now pre-

vailed uninterrupted, save by the hollow reverberation of his footsteps. The sighing breeze soft murmured through the intermingling foliage, and disturbed not the gentle calm.

Ernesto would not, however, give up the research; a deep groan close behind him, revealed at once the utterer. It was an aged peasant, whose leg and arm seemed miserably shattered. In an accent of compasssion, Almerini demanded of his son (a youth of fifteen), the cause of the misfortune.

His ghastly and pallid looks bespoke that no common event had occasioned it. His faltering tongue withheld the communication he wished to make; but Ernesto had seen enough to interest him—a fellow creature was in pain—the wish of alleviation became excited, and

lending his aid to assist the feeble efforts of the boy, he succeeded in supporting the suffering Carucci to his cottage. Their hasty knock was quickly answered by the expectant Claudia.

"Ah me!" said she, surveying the lacerated state of her husband. "My fears were not ill founded—what dreadful disaster has befallen you?"

"Oh, mother! mother!" cried Horatio, "we have seen that evil spirit again, Oh! how hideous it stared."

"Alas! poor me, I knew it would be so—it was not for nothing the embers refused to burn, and the lamp, spite of my trimming, went three times out."

Ernesto, leaving Claudia to recount her superstitious omens, went in quest of a doctor.

The evil spirit, so called by Horatio, bore some resemblance to the one he had seen, and perhaps might be the same.

Though the duca would not hearken to the tale, he could not divest himself of belief, for he was a witness of its authenticity.

Determined when more at ease, to question Carucci, he delayed investigation for that night, and sending the doctor, immediately returned to the pallazzo; not chusing to make his father the confident of his night's adventure, he preserved profound secresy.

As early as possible he repaired to the cottage. Carucci, though suffering acute pain, was as well as could be expected. With the most grateful thanks

he acknowledged the kindness of the young marchese."

"You have indeed saved my life, senor; but for you I had died on the spot. What could that poor boy (pointing to Horatio) have done?"

A generous glow heightened the native grace of Ernesto, and he changed the subject, by inquiring into the particulars of the mischance.

"It is all owing, Senor Marchese, to that malignant spirit, who hovers nightly in the forest; but for what purpose, without it is to scare honest folks out of their wits, I cannot tell. Were it only to haunt the guilty, methinks he would not molest harmless people, who strive all in their power to get out of his way."

Ernesto could not forbear a smile, and with much difficulty preserved his gravity.

The old man resumed: "I have a poor relation who lives some little distance from the forest. He is in great need, senor—I and my boy went last night to carry him a few things, and few enough, as the sacred Virgin knows; but such as they were he was delighted with them. He would not let us go, and the night was spent in gossip. I'll own I felt strangely; for the thoughts of crossing the forest did not well please me:—but what was to be done? Putting the best face on the business, not to frighten the boy, we prepared for the jaunt, and walked unmolested till we came to the forest; at the extremity of which, the usual noise that bespeaks the spectre's approach, filled me with

the most deadly fear. Horatio heard the same of his own accord; for I said nothing, not to terrify him; that is, senor, I was unable to speak, or perhaps I might. In vain I tried to move, my feet would not stir a step; but presently, oh! I never shall forget it! the ghost itself came forward — I quaked, and trembled exceedingly. It fixed on us its glaring eyes; they were, I am sure, of many colours, and shot fire. Horatio fell on his knees to beg for mercy; and whether I intended to follow his example, or only to get away, I cannot tell; but fall I did, and with such violence, that I fear I shall remember it all the days of my life."

"And what came of the ghost, after the accident?" demanded Ernesto.

"Horatio tells me it walked as usual toward the pallazzo."

"Walked as usual toward the pallazio! It is strange," thought Ernesto, inwardly reflecting.

"Could he describe the spectre's dress?" was the next question asked.

Carucci could not do that.

"But I have seen him, Senor Marchese, in many different dresses; but why he should chuse the pallazzo, indeed puzzles me much: had it been the castello.....but it is not right to speak our thoughts; the poor must hold their tongue, or I said, he might have chose the Castello di Vivalva! For sure the senor himself is in league with a something similar; he always seems bewildered, and rarely smiles on his vassals, save to his favourite three. And I am sure, Senor Marchese, I never see them men but what I tremble all over; and

Claudia says, 'that bodes evil.' It is no good sign."

Ernesto, with seeming carelessness, asked a few more questions, then left the cottage; though not before he had liberally supplied the peasant's wants.

He secretly resolved to gratify the curiosity excited by the old man's relation; but this could not be done immediately, without betraying his intention:—he recollected a former interruption, occasioned by the mistaken zeal of the vassals.

Who could the mysterious rambler be? He had not heard of any outrage committed by him! Might it not be Montaldi, who had adopted that disguise to avoid impertinent curiosity? He rejected the idea as improbable, for on that very night on which he first en-

countered the spectre, he also saw Montaldi, and nearly at the same time. That he was connected with some designing characters, he had every reason to believe, from the disgraceful company in which he surprised him. But the whole appeared as if the act of coersion, more than willing compliance. So prone was he to acquit Vincent, even against reason.

" His secresy, and abrupt departure certainly give room for suspicion; and yet his excuse may be quite plausible; for at the period the duca and myself were injuring him most, by doubting the purity of his principles, he was in the cavern of banditti, maintaining a noble struggle between honour and liberty. But yielding to his generous feelings to release a captive female, he had bound himself for ever to guilt—had purchased a moment's pleasure with a

...f pain. Oh! equal to the task, her grateful thanks had cheered the joyless pursuit of your vocation—had stilled that voice, which, while it called you robber, struck daggers to your heart. But Orsino, by pity moved, knew how to prize the sacrifice, restored you to liberty; but not, alas! to happiness.—Pitying angels! if at your bar an offender like him should come, oh, exercise your brightest attribute. Extend to him the mercy he borrowed from you; let this single action, like the wide mantle of forgiveness, conceal all other errors, and veil them from the sight—so shall the wretch, by guilt once sullied, with virtuous effort wipe off the foul stain, and find his path with roses strewed."

With enthusiasm Ernesto dwelt on the subject—a subject so congenial to a mind like his. Could he think light of Rosalia's deliverer? Most willingly would he

have encountered the greatest difficulty to prove his gratitude. But Montaldi was removed beyond his power, and could not be benefited by his service. This damped the transport of his bosom; but sanguine hope beguiled him on, he yet might meet Montaldi.

## CHAP. X.

THE roseate morn with bold intrusion awoke the slumbering Ernesto. The sun had already risen, and as the strong rays reflected on the painted casement, diffused a light the most glorious.

Almerini hastily threw on his cloaths, and descended to the saloon; he found his father already assembled, and prepared to excuse himself.

The duca with his usual good humour, smiled at his energy, and gaily remarked, the indulgence was uppar-

donable in a lover. "But as your mistress is absent, you did not care I suppose."

Ernesto returned the raillery, and they partook of breakfast.

The whole of that, and many succeeding days were devoted to festivity, and so totally engrossed the attention of Ernesto, that he had not found time to prosecute his design.

"This night," said he, "should nothing intervene, I will commence the watch, and discover, if possible, who the wanderer is."

Carucci had recovered from his hurts, and still persisted in the tale—a tale now spread abroad with much embellishment, inasmuch that the forest had become a spot of terror to the peasants, and by

them considered as a rendezvous for evil spirits.

With satisfaction Ernesto beheld the burnished rays of the departing sun, and hailed the approach of grey-eyed eve: he marked with secret approval the dun shades of night,

"I have not long to wait," thought he, as with unusual vivacity he bid his father good night.

Retired to his chamber, he paused awhile to collect himself, and drawing a chair, placed it before the window. He threw up the casement to enjoy the reviving breeze; the moon was now at the full, and imparted a light that rivaled day, and rendered each object equally as perceptible. Numerous stars bespangled heaven's high arch, and added to the beauty of the scenery.

Ernesto closed the window, and cautiously descended with as little noise as possible. Scarce had he left the pallazzo, when he discerned at some short distance a person fixed in ardent gaze, as if contemplating that dwelling. The words of Carucci struck him, but it was no hideous spectre, the stranger seemed of noble mein.

Ernesto regarded him with attention; his attitude bespoke mental affliction; his arms were crossed on his bosom, and his eyes, as a moon-beam revealed his figure, were directed toward some particular object.

"Sure 'tis Montaldi!" said he, advancing with hasty strides.

Montaldi (for it was him) started, awoke from his reverie, and evidently averted his head.

Resentment tinged the cheek of Almerini, and native pride would have restrained the act; by friendship impelled he attempted to detain him, but Montaldi eluded his grasp and passed quickly on.

Wonder-struck, he remained rivetted to the spot; the insult encreased in proportion as anger subsided. The conduct of Montaldi was indefensible, it admitted of no palliation, he had accosted first this insolent unknown and he deigned no reply, save by an inclination of the head.

"'Tis beyond endurance!" said he, while wounded pride added to the poignancy of his feelings; "yet still he hovers within the precincts of the pallazzo. Perhaps he has some sinister view. Why did I let him escape? had I pursued, some secret plot might have been

discovered, but sudden surprise deprived me of prudence. Strange, incomprehensible being, of whom against conviction I cannot think ill—yet still he might have returned my salutation—but then a conversation had commenced that might have terminated displeasing to him; he knows my prying disposition—I had made some unpleasant remark—, asked some inquisitive question. He has acted right."

And once more he sought an excuse to justify the inexplicable conduct of Montaldi.

"Why stop I here? Shall I await the rising of the sun? My folly requires no witness."

He then bent his steps towards the pallazzo, and entered in safety, but could

not dismiss the troublesome ideas that crowded on his imagination.

"What could induce Montaldi to behave so uncourteous? I have not knowingly offended him; perhaps it was to avoid my thanks. But his manners so altered, so repulsive. Ah! my father, I will no longer dispute your judgment; you have not injured, as I too partially thought, the mysterious Florentine, guilt is the cause of his seclusion—a seclusion would I had never disturbed. Ungrateful Montaldi! disappointment shall not urge me to retaliate; I will not degrade you, even in the eyes of my father."

Ernesto with silent chagrin passed the day; of a communicative disposition, a secret laboured strongly in his bosom for disclosure, and several times he had

near transgressed; however he proved victorious, and congratulated himself on his forbearance.

Among the guests that graced the duca's hospitable board was the Marchese di Viralva. Uninvited, he partook of that festivity which excluded none; but it was not without design that he, unbidden, visited the Almerini family; he wished to obtain confidence, and therefore practised this affected humility. Familiarity he considered the first step toward free communication, and communication the strong cement of friendship; that point once gained, reduced every other impediment. All obstacles removed, complete victory would be his.

The idea was too transporting not to be cherished with delight by Altidore, and the joy of anticipation was his. Rosalia his victim, must yield submis-

sion for her own sake. "And who shall dare interpose?" exclaimed, he with exultation.

A stranger to remorse, he beheld unmoved, the venerable Di Bartolo; even panted for the moment to wound his parental bosom.

Ernesto, as a successful rival, raised a conflict not to be subdued by any thing less than revenge.

He feared not a second defeat. "Unless," said he, ironically, to Theodore, another hero should come forward to disappoint me, and release the fair one."

But against all interference of that description, Viralva thought himself too well guarded, and smiled at the credulity he successfully imposed on.

The unsuspecting duca doubted not his integrity, and gave due credit to his specious professions.

The young marchese, though he disliked Altidore's character, could not refuse his overtures without a breach of hospitality.

The otherwise haughty Viralva, scrupled not to unbend; and to suit his purpose, spared not the utmost condescension.

Ernesto had several times encountered Montaldi; the same reserve marked each meeting, and left him at a loss to reconcile this apparent contradiction. In vain he strove to fathom the mystery, it only appeared the more impenetrable, and involved him in greater perplexity.

A new and more pleasing subject, now engaged his attention; Rosalia and Laurentini had returned home, the former in high spirits, and the latter, if not as gay, at least improved by the excursion.

She had reasoned herself into composure, and by an effort of self-command, repressed that turbulent grief so fatal to the object by whom it is cherished.

Superior to selfish indulgence, she had resigned all thoughts of monastic seclusion, heroically resolving to live for her relations, and by contributing to their happiness, receive an equal share. Perhaps another motive nearly as powerful, might have influenced this resolution, for her heart whispered in language too persuasive to be misunderstood, that she could not voluntary renounce that world of which Montaldi formed a part, and

her tendernes for him increased in proportion as the idea of relinquishing him for ever suggested itself.

The duca delighted, witnessed the happy change that had taken place.

Laurentini no longer an uninterested partaker of pleasure, seemed to derive satisfaction from the most insignificant amusement, and the serenity of her countenance banished those fears so tormenting to a parent like Almerini. To love he attributed the return of her vivacity, and no other than Almanza could be the favoured object. He felt every inclination to encourage the pretensions of that young man; his principles he admired, while the exalted qualities of his mind obtained for him a sentiment still warmer.

The disposition of Alonzo was rash

and impetuous, but these were the mere ebullitions of youth, and like the momentary tempest, to be succeeded by the calm of reason; maturity would convert those blemishes into so many ornaments.

"Can he be less than perfect," exclaimed the duca, with enthusiasm; "when blessed with such a mother? He will surely imitate her virtues from example, and practice them from inclination,

Donna de Almanza was really a character worthy of imitation: with a heart feelingly alive to the distress of the unfortunate, flow from whatever source it would, she gave liberally, but not ostentatiously, and appeared the humblest when most pre-eminently great: lenient to the erring, she forgave in another what she would have never pardoned in her-

self; silent where others reproved, she assumed not the prerogative of censuring an indigent profligate, while those more successful escaped her animadversion; if she used invective, it was against vice itself, while pitying, she resigned to self-inflicted punishment, beings weak enough to yield to its influence.

An union so auspicious would have afforded to the duca the utmost satisfaction; but like many others, Almerini measured happiness by the standard of his own wishes, and considered that a permanent peace which was only a temporary suspension of hostilities, and the vulnerable fort had soon to experience a surprisal—had soon to prove the insufficiency of the auxiliaries she had called in to repel a force invincible.

Ernesto drank largely of the cup of

felicity, the joy-inspiring presence of Rosalia banished every unpleasant sensation, and attuned the bosom to harmony. Every wish gratified, he now rejoiced at a separation which had filled him with so much regret; it revealed to him the welcome truth, that Rosalia was dear—most dear to his heart, and as he traced in her sweet smiles, mutual affection, he proudly congratulated himself on its possession.

Rosalia tenderly loved the young marchese, and a being of a less timid nature might have given him more striking proofs, but what the senora really felt, from native delicacy became concealed, and might have discouraged a lover not so ardent. The virtues shone not in her with that force and energy which some who practice them least have acquired the happy art of rendering conspicuous. Reserved even to bashful-

ness, a thorough knowledge of her character was required before her amiable qualities could be justly appreciated. Her countenance and figure were singularly striking, and her commanding aspect led you not to expect the angelic softness that reigned within: her eyes were dark, full, and penetrating; their intelligent glance bespoke a lively wit, that vented not itself in invective: the glossy lustre of her luxuriant hair, as it adorned her fine and open forehead blended the happiest contrast.

Ernesto possessed her first and earliest affection; incapable of change, her thoughts had never strayed, though innumerable offers had been made to her, though persuasion had come mended from the lips of eloquence, though merit itself, the merit she admired had pleaded most earnestly.

Not brighter than the morning sun, appeared the prospects of Ernesto; not lighter than the passing breeze, seemed his tranquil bosom. Nothing now retarded his approaching felicity; and if arriving at the summit, lessens the height increased by distance, than had he surmounted every difficulty.

His beloved Rosalia had promised shortly to reward his constancy with the possession of her hand. Already busy fancy begun her work, and imagination launched the enraptured Almerini into a sea of pleasure.

The idolized object of all his wishes was the happy partaker of each fairy scene — unalterably his, beyond the power of all rivals. Blissful thought! reflection replete with joy; not rapture's thrill, nor pleasure's glow, imparted to the delighted Ernesto a sensation half so

exquisite as that which the consent of Rosalia excited.

Like the soft breath of re-animation it revived his drooping spirits, and bid young hope blossom.

The duca, with an equal proportion of happiness, witnessed that of his son. Laurentini even forgot Montaldi; that is to say, in this hour of universal harmony she remembered him not with her usual despondency.

The Senor di Bartolo felt more than mere language could express:—he felt that it is even in our power to love another better than ourself.

The very peasantry betrayed the most extravagant joy, when informed by the vassals of the much wished for event. But there was one whose smooth brow

became unusually contracted — whose fine and manly features assumed the stern air of inbred disquiet; and Altidore di Viralva was this invidious being.

Awoke from midnight slumber by the obtrusive thought, he paced the limits of his chamber.

"And why this tumult?" exclaimed he, after the pause of a moment.— "What means this faction in my breast? It is not love.—Viralva once scorned, shrinks from the object with disgust. Lie still ye turbulent passions! Unless self-gratified, ye require no more.

"There is a satisfaction in revenge so near allied to happiness, that in seeking one, I should enjoy the other. Is it no triumph when we implore in vain to subdue the inflexible bosom? Not by

mean supplication, but by the force of power! and when they would awaken pity, re-echo back their own refusal.—Oh! this is ecstacy—ecstacy that bears so strong a resemblance to real pleasure, that Altidore would willingly resign every consideration to cherish the fond chimera. How shall I act to escape suspicion? It must not be—Ernesto, the favoured Ernesto, would resent such an insult. He knows not that it was I that snatched the cup from his lips; weak effort, and then detection might have taken place—myself exposed, and held up to the world as a monster—placed below their very contempt. And could I have borne such a degradation? The gaze of peasants! I had heard my vassals repeat the tale. Never! never! I will recede in time, and mutely hear the boisterous voice of loud exultant mirth. I can triumph too!—What if it be by myself? These eyes shall feast

on him who marred my schemes. This moment to his prison I will go; and if he sleeps, as they say the innocent do, let me I say, disturb his rest. This sickly taper shall guide me on."

Altidore snatched up the light, and found himself before the prison door.

"What noise was that? Let's hear—he raves! Or is it the visions of the night? He dreams of me—I will even realize his foolish fancies."

Viralva unceremoniously turned the lock, and rudely entered. The affrighted captive started from his uneasy bed, and by the quick rolling of his languid eye, bespoke his surprise at the unusual visit. This Viralva with a sneer observed.

"Pleasure," said he, "is most welcome when it comes unexpected:—I

therefore did not apprise you of my intention."

"Perhaps," retorted the prisoner, "were I to say the pleasure is mutual, I might speak correct; for believe me, Viralva, the sight of me affords you none—the murderer, unawed by conscience, nevertheless shrinks from the murderous sword—it perpetuates his crime, and he abhors the remembrance; apply that, I say, Viralva."

"Poor dreamer, your thoughts still rove! Awake yourself, and collect them."

"Impossible, in your presence:—it is like telling the fearful to take courage when the object of their terror is still present."

"Well, well, I should not have dis-

turbed your delirium; but it is your own fault for being meddlesome. How dare you interfere with my happiness; I had suffered you to roam at large but for your insolence."

"Nay, say not so, your fears would not let you."

"My fears, what have I to fear?—Let reflection remind you who you are; a being destitute! friendless, and forlorn!"

"Not friendless, Viralva;—I have friends at whom even Altidore would tremble: but my honour withholds me. It is not your menaces that deter me."

"It is—it is what?"

"Why ask the question, when your own conscience can best answer it? Oh!

Viralva, unblushing as thou art, I would not exchange my feelings for all your share of false happiness. Surrounded by wealth that you cannot enjoy; invested with power that you dare not exercise."

"Hold! insolent, or your audacity shall become chastised," said Altidore, scarcé able to suppress his emotion; for most forcibly did he feel the truth of what the captive had said; and with the utmost precipitation he left him.

## CHAP. XI.

ERNESTO, to avoid the fervid rays of a midday sun, had sought the peaceful shade. The luxuriant foliage claimed his attention; and to the beauties of Nature he directed his observation.—There he found much to admire: in this pleasing contemplation he had whiled away the passing hour. In his way home he called on Carucci. The good old man hailed him with joy, and poured forth the gratitude he felt, in terms so simple, yet so unaffected, that made way to the heart of Almerini.

Nearly overpowered by the blessings of Claudia, and the youthful Horatio, he entreated them to desist; and to oblige him the honest creatures did violence to their feelings.

Ernesto had just reached the threshhold of their humble door, when Janetta, the gondolier's wife, without observing him, passed rudely by; and wringing her hands, exclaimed in sounds the most lamentable.

"Oh! that I should live to see the day.—How people, to be sure, can be deceived—so noble, so gentle as he appeared to be."

Having in some measure unburthened her mind, she raised her eyes toward her anxious auditors; she beheld Ernesto, and dropping her lowest courtesy, expressed surprise at seeing him.

Almerini smiled, and equally as interested as the rest, begged her to repeat the tale.

"And with sorrow enough," said she, "I shall do it.—You know, Senor Marchese, that Montaldi, whom you once inquired of me about."

A blush tinged the cheek of Ernesto, as he replied in the affirmative.

"You wanted then sadly to know who he was; now I can tell you, though mayhap you have heard since."

Ernesto answered in the negative.

"No!—To be sure, I thought not! People are not fond of publishing their own disgrace; and that forsooth would be unwise too. How sly, how artful; but no good I thought, however, was in

all his secresy. How will you be astonished when I tell you."

Here she paused to recover breath, which she had nearly exhausted, with energy and eagerness, to relate in a moment what already had taken up treble the time.

Ernesto, all curiosity, secretly chid her unnecessary delay.

Janetta resumed—"Will you believe me, when I tell you, and I am sure it is truth; for I was eye witness of it myself—that is, my husband told me, and that nearly amounts to the same; that the Senor Montaldi was nothing less than captain of the banditti—them wicked, cruel wretches who haunt the woods, and make the forest a terror to honest folks."

Ernesto the most interested of the

whole group, was lost in astonishment; he knew not what to think, and closely questioned Janetta.

" 'Tis a fact indeed, Senor Marchese, and to prove it such, if you will bear with me a little longer, I'll tell you all. Last night as Pietro was returning home after a hard day's rowing, for he says never had his gondola been so much employed, and of course he made something handsome, so I suppose his thoughts were lighter than usual, for he says four terrible fellows, notorious bandits, came smack upon him unawares, that is, he did not see them till they came full upon him, so he cringed himself up to let them pass; three of them he knew well enough, having often seen them, but the fourth, he said, looked so unlike the rest, that belike, he thought it might be some cavalier they had taken prisoner. Peep at him he was determined he would, as he passed

by—but the Virgin defend us all! he says he fairly trembled on finding it to be the Senor Montaldi. Help speaking he said he could not, had his life paid for it.

" 'Ah! my good fellow!' said the senor, in answer to what Pietro said to him; what it was however I dont know, for he did not tell me, and I never thought of asking.

" The other three, finding the senor was minded to stop, called out with impatience, 'Do not, capitano, parley with him.' So then the senor walked on, Pietro says; and he, as fast as ever he could, hurried on to me, and related what I have told you. We had not left off speaking of him more than an hour I am sure, when who should come in but he himself. Mercy on us, how he looked! his face pale and haggard, his

clothes disordered and covered with blood. I trembled from head to foot, and durst not speak a word for the life of me; Pietro was not much better, but wished, I suppose, to be thought more courageous, and mustered up courage to ask the senor, 'What ailed him?' At this he started, and we feared he had lost his wits, or something worse had befel him; but presently he came to himself, and spoke of the blood as if it was nothing; said he should change his dress, but that at present he was so much fatigued that a little rest was necessary. He denied being wounded when I asked him, though I knowed he was, by the pain he seemed in, but this he thought would be telling his profession, and sore ashamed he seemed of it; belike he did not think I knowed any thing about the matter, so I soon showed him I did, but when I said, capitano! the tears came in his eyes, and cry I am

sure he did, for he took out his pocket-handkerchief, and without speaking a word, left us. Plague on my wisdom, said I, as soon as he was gone, I've drove the poor creature out, and very likely did him harm, for I suppose he only come to avoid pursuit. Pietro was as vexed as myself, but all answered no purpose—the senor was gone. Now what think you of all this?" demanded Janetta.

The expected answer was not delayed, and all, but Ernesto, commented on the tale; he, deeply interested, left the cottage.

However he felt inclined to discredit the report, the mysterious conduct of Montaldi seemed now, more than ever, to confirm it. What but a consciousness of guilt could induce him to act with so much caution? One of the

banditti! A thought immediately struck him; he was connected with the band that had attacked Rosalia, and to conceal his real character, he had given the appearance of accident to their meeting. The generosity of Orsino was also fictitious, and the whole finesse calculated to deceive. He shuddered when he reflected such a man had near become his friend.

"But the friendship I proffered, could afford him no satisfaction, too vitiated, he declined my offers; yet it was generous not to impose on my credulity. His residence at the casino—I suppose he occasionally joins the band; perhaps his situation there best suited their designs—he could gain intelligence which they were excluded from."

The demolition of the casino con-

firmed the idea, and Ernesto, self-convinced, passed the awful fiat of condemnation on the unfortunate Montaldi. The supernatural appearance as described by Carucci, he also imputed to him, and resolved, if possible, to discover and detect the imposition. The project, though fraught with danger, deterred him not; he required no companion, and had he, it would have been a difficult matter to find one. Whether this conviction influenced him, I shall not pretend to say.

To Laurentini he imparted the intelligence he had gained.

The effect produced on her was most powerful, but Ernesto imputed it not to the right cause; her emotion he ascribed to wounded pride, and readily entered into her feelings. The account he gave admitted not of contradiction, and how-

ever unwilling, she was compelled to give it credit.

Ernesto had indeed unwittingly given the death-stroke to her happiness. Sunk to the lowest abyss of despair, she recoiled with horror when she reflected on the awful precipice on which she had stood. "One step more had sunk me into the gulph of inextricable misery—I had been lost indeed! Allied to a robber!—Dreadful thought! let me for ever banish thee."

Yielding to despondency, the roses forsook her cheek, and the smile that so late graced her expressive countenance was seen no more.

The duca beheld the change with less regret than he would otherwise have felt, for the Marquis de Almanza was hourly expected. The spirits of Lauren-

tini would doubtless revive—the conversation of Elvira would restore her vivacity.

Rosalia employed every soothing art to compose the mind of her cousin, which in spite of disguise, too evidently bespoke perturbation. She, like her uncle, concluded some secret attachment to be the cause. But who could the object be? For she called to mind the reserve with which she treated Alonzo, and had even expressed a wish that the Senora Rameraz might engage his affection, and grant him the return he so highly merited—a return she professed herself unable to make. Laurentini was above disguise, and really feeling a tenderness for Alonzo, would not have practised deception. With fond solicitude, she constantly engaged Laurentini in some favourite pursuit or another.

With a mixture of unconcern, she heard announced the arrival of the Almanza family, and by the coldness of her manner, completely disappointed the duca.

But if he felt surprised at her unaccountable conduct, how much more was he astonished at the unbounded joy—nay, rapture, her looks expressed on being informed by Elvira that her brother had openly declared himself the lover of Agatha, and was by her accepted.

"Then I am happy!" exclaimed she. Nor was this a mere exclamation dictated by pride, for Laurentini really felt what she said, and sincerely wished the marquis the utmost felicity.

Alonzo yielded to the prudent advice of his mother, and convinced of the

hopelessness of his passion, called reason to his aid, and conquered predilection. Some may call in question the sincerity of his profession, but truly Alonzo loved—loved even to enthusiasm, and no consideration would have induced him to resign his claim to a rival, however formidable; but when convinced beyond a doubt—beyond the delusion of hope, that Laurentini regarded him not, he relinquished those attentions that indifference would convert into persecution.

Almost constantly in the society of the fascinating Agatha, his wounded mind found the balm of consolation in her engaging conversation. Time softened the pang of disappointment, and divested of passion, the name of Laurentini awakened no other sensation than that inspired by friendship. With self-reproach he now reflected on that

unwearied perseverence so distressing to a heart like her's.

Agatha again resumed the dominion she had formerly held, and that amiable girl, forgetful of the slight offered her, blessed with a promise of her hand, the inconstant Alonzo. The powerful pleading of her own heart, and the persuasion of her father, contributed in a great measure, to the consent she pronounced.

Alonzo and Ernesto, in a situation similar, may be supposed to possess similar feelings; together they would converse on the only subject capable of interesting them, and together spend the hours in pleasing anticipation.

Almerini, who had only deferred, but not relinquished his design of elucidating, if possible, the mystery of the

forest, now sought to awaken the curiosity of Almanza. If he succeeded, he should engage for himself an agreeable companion.

The first opportunity he related the whole affair to Alonzo, and as he had predicted, the account was treated with ridicule.

"I am of your opinion," said he, "but sometimes these reports are raised to disguise fraud; let us detect the impostors."

Almanza had gone too far to recede, and rather reluctantly consented.

At the appointed hour, the two friends taking each other by the hand, promised no force should divide them, nor no danger tempt them to forsake each other.

Satisfied with this assurance, they sallied forth, both enboldened by the spirit of enterprise. The night was boisterous, windy, and uncomfortable; the thick black lowering clouds portended an approaching storm.

Ernesto beheld the threatening aspect of the heavens with some degree of alarm; but this soon became dispelled by the spirited encouragement of Alonzo, and they resumed their station.

Scarce had they ceased speaking, when the buzz of voices at no great distance, demanded their attention. The clashing of swords, and the dismal clanking of chains prepared them for some dreadful event.

Resolved to maintain silence, they hardly ventured to breathe. Lights now issued from every direction, and rendered visible the solemn procession as it

slowly moved along; sounds resembling a funeral dirge assailed their ears; deep-toned hollow voices chanted a kind of requiem; six men muffled in long cloaks, supported a most magnificent bier. Ernesto and Alonzo at a short distance followed them.

Of a sudden the whole group disappeared, but in what manner, it was impossible to ascertain; there was neither break, nor opening, nor avenue to admit of a quick turn; beside they were pursued so close, that the lights would have betrayed them, had it been a reality.

"'Tis mere phantasy," said Alonzo, firmly persuaded that what they had beheld was no natural appearance.

"Could the voices also be ideal?" demanded Ernesto.

"If one, the whole, surely."

"I cannot believe that, and were I so sceptically inclined, there—"?

"It were better, senor, you was not so hard of belief."

This sentence was delivered in a firm and manly tone; in vain they looked round for the unknown speaker, he was no where to be found.

"In the name of mystery, who art thou?" exclaimed Almerini, his feelings worked up almost to a pitch of madness.

It was plain every word they had uttered had been overheard, by the applicable response.

fierce gust of wind extinguished

the lights they had concealed behind the trees.

"The very air seems enchanted," said Alonzo.

Ernesto mournfully answered in the affirmative, fearful of trusting his voice, lest the same ungracious sounds should greet his ears, but vain was his precaution, for the same voice repeated—

"Even whispers can be heard; many a lover, did he listen to them, would be undeceived."

"We know not how to apply your words," said Alonzo, with an extraordinary effort of courage.

"Whose bosom do they strike with conviction?" said the unknown.

"Neither," was the reply.

"Then let neither apply it," returned the other, and spoke no more, though the friends made several ineffectual essays to draw him into conversation.

Alonzo looked stedfastly in the face of Ernesto, as if he would by looks, enquire what he meant to do, for not certain yet that they were alone, words, he thought, might be dangerous. Almerini motioned him to follow, and together they left the forest, without meeting with the least interruption.

Within sight of the pallazzo, all fear vanished, and each congratulated the other on their safety. Immediately a figure rushed from behind them, and gently touching Alonzo on the shoulder, said, as he quickly passed on—

"You should come unattended, senor."

Wonder-struck, Alonzo grasped the arm of Ernesto, exclaiming with emotion—

"What could the stranger mean?"

"More, my friend, than I can tell."

"It seems, Ernesto, I was the object alluded to the whole time, though when I interrogated him, he chose not to be explicit. 'You should come unattended, senor,' said he, as he passed me; perhaps he had some important secret to reveal; what shall I do?" demanded he with a stifled sigh.

"Have you confidence in the words of a stranger? Were any ill to befall you, I should never forgive myself; but let us enter the pallazzo, and compose ourselves, for I assure you an hour's rest will not be unnecessary.

followed his advice, and in entered.

When alone in his chamber, he repeated to himself a thousand times the words of the stranger.

"What did they portend? nothing less than that Agatha was faithless; her acceptance of me was doubtless to repay my former inconstancy.—Yes, I must meet this stranger, converse with him, and learn, if possible, the name of my rival. Perhaps the whole is an ingenious contrivance of Ernesto's to unveil to me the deception, for if otherwise, why did he request my company? And the warning of the stranger, unless dictated by him, savours of improbability. Why follow me here, when the castello of my mother would have answered as well. Almerini, acquainted with the designs a, has sought these means to

inform me of them.—But the funeral procession—was that necessary? The visible alarm of Ernesto—what could occasion that?"

But this, and many other seeming contrarieties, Alonzo reduced to the standard of his own wishes.

Ernesto equally as perplexed, passed the night not much to his satisfaction; busy and obtruding thought suffered him not to enjoy repose, his mind continually harrassed by the adventures of the night. Not gifted like Alonzo, with the self-presented clue to unravel those mysteries that had so astonished him, he could only trust to time for their elucidation.

## CHAP. XII.

At breakfast, Alonzo and Ernesto interchanged looks, by way of reviving the occurrence of the night: too much engaged to converse in private, they were compelled to wait till the hour of retirement. Almanza's spirits were much depressed, but luckily passed unnoticed by all but Almerini, who, acquainted with the cause, sought to divert the effect.

The hospitality of the duca, and the engaging vivacity of Rosalia, in some measure dispelled his melancholy.

When contemplating the latter, he would exclaim, "Happy Almerini, soon will you possess a treasure invaluable; while I, alas!—"

Here recollection heaved his bosom; he thought of Agatha, and his anguish encreased. As if to augment his sufferings, the Senora Rameraz was continually mentioned and praised by his mother.

Agatha was a great favourite of the donna's, she admired her amiable qualities, and already felt for her the affection of a mother.

Not more welcome than the silver sounds of harmony were to Alonzo the chimes of the turret clock, as they proclaimed the usual hour for retiring; scarce could he conceal the satisfaction he felt.

According to appointment, he met Ernesto. Closing cautiously the chamber door, he observed with a smile, "Here at least we are safe, and may speak without listeners. How would you advise me to act—shall I meet the stranger?"

"The affair is intricate," returned Almerini, "it requires some deliberation; perhaps by complying with the requisition of the unknown you may involve yourself in danger; at least we must not decide hastily."

Alonzo hesitated, still of opinion that Ernesto was the sole contriver of the scheme, he thought he could not run much risk by accepting the mysterious invitation. Almerini's reluctance he imputed to finesse; "He wishes not to discover himself."

While this was passing in his mind,

far other thoughts employed Ernesto; he seriously reflected on the imprudence of suffering Alonzo to venture unaccompanied. It might be the plot of some secret enemy :—influenced by this consideration, he peremptorily refused consent.

" You shall not go, Alonzo; it is rash presumption! Unpardonable temerity! You know not whom you may encounter; and what is the valour of a single arm when opposed perhaps to numbers. Suffer me to become your companion, and I will agree."

" The stranger will not speak, finding I have disregarded his injunction; he will withhold all communication. Oh! suffer me to depart, you know not how I am interested. Figure to yourself a sea-beat mariner, whom deceitful hope has cheered with the promised haven;

then behold him wrecked in sight of port. Such an one am I, if Agatha has deceived me. By all the feelings of a lover, I conjure you to suffer me to depart. Be assured no harm is intended."

"May it prove so," replied Ernesto, in a tone of irresolution.

He could not withstand entreaty, and reluctantly complied with Alonzo's request. Though he used every argument to dissuade him, he was nevertheless of his opinion, that if he went at all, it was best to go alone; for should he attempt to follow, he doubted not but some person was on the look-out, to guard against interruption.

Invoking every Saint to protect Almanza, with the utmost anxiety he awaited his return.

Tedious appeared the lingering hours, and each moment spent in expectation, seemed as an age. A thousand times he reproached himself for granting permission to the impetuous Alonzo :— " Whither has that unhappy friend betaken himself. Guided by suspicion and jealousy, danger will overtake him, while he, unprepared, will fall an unresisting victim. Why did I not dissuade him ? But full bent on investigation, he had disregarded entreaty—had heeded not my warning."

It was long past the solemn hour of midnight, and the fears of Ernesto arose to an alarming height. Alonzo had not yet returned—what could occasion his stay ?

" Some accident has surely befel him !" exclaimed he, as with broken

and irregular steps, he paced his chamber.

His feelings were poignant in the extreme, and could only be equalled by the dreadful state of uncertainty he was in.

Ernesto scarce ventured to breathe lest he should lose the welcome sound. But nought disturbed the deathlike stillness that prevailed, save the dismal howling of the wind.

At each interval he was a prey to the most fearful apprehensions—he thought he heard a groan. His pulse beat quick; he listened—it was but the murmurs of the gale:—all was silence, and hope by turns became cherished.

Again he heard a groan! Fancy re-

presented to his view, Alonzo, pale, wounded, and disfigured. The thought was not endurable, and with distraction in his looks he rushed down stairs.

The whole was but the delusion of imagination; no human being met his gaze. Bewildered and perplexed, he pursued his listless way, uncertain which direction to take.

What were his sensations when he beheld the dawn of day. The ruddy peasants with cheerful looks, led forth their flocks: the son of Almerini envied them — envied their unclouded brow, their peaceful bosom; while his, alas! was tortured with anguish. How should he impart the dreadful intelligence? How sooth the wounded feelings of a mother? Yet delay was dangerous. Immediate pursuit might

avert the fate of his too adventurous friend.

But the more he reflected, the more he felt himself unequal to the task. What was to be done? The early sun began to rise, and roseate streaked heaven's blue expanse.

Ernesto tardily obeyed the warning, and with dejected aspect entered the pallazzo. There he encountered the duca; he shrank from the inquisition of his eye; but his disordered and distracted looks had already excited his notice.

With great reluctance Ernesto related the fatal truth. The surprise, astonishment, and distress of the duca, rivalled description: the whole appeared to him like a dream; but when awful reality

presented itself, it robbed him of the power of thinking. How should he soften the tale to Donna de Almanza? What anguish would rend her maternal bosom!

Ernesto, whose sanguine disposition suffered him not to yield to despair, still entertained hopes of Alonzo's return. Perhaps his mysterious friend had acquainted him with some affair that required his personal attendance. He knew his persevering temper; but yet he would have gave him some intimation.

Convinced of the impossibility of his so doing, he rested satisfied. But this idea was overruled by the duca; he was persuaded that no inducement could tempt Alonzo voluntary to stay. He knows the anxiety we must feel, and the tenderness of his mother; the former

he would not willingly excite, nor disregard the latter.

"But you know not on what conditions the secret might have been imparted, or what restrictions imposed—perhaps the oath of Alonzo is pledged, and shall he not fulfil it?"

There was something like probability in all this, and the duca could not but acquiesce.

"Let us however," continued he, "lose no opportunity of rendering assistance, should it be required, to the rash Almanza."

Ernesto willingly accepted this proposal; for he felt he could not behold the anguish of Donna Almanza, who must consider him the author of her son's misfortune. The tears of Elvira

too would accuse him—how could he withstand their eloquent reproaches?

Accompanied by several of the vassals, he left unsearched not the smallest avenue. Each intricate winding of the forest they explored, nor suffered the narrowest defile to escape their minute inspection: but all to no effect —all was dark and impenetrable as the thick embowering shade that entangled them in its inextricable mazes. No sound was heard, save the hollow reverberation of the horses' hoofs.

Ernesto, perplexed, but not disheartened, would not give up the pursuit, flattering hope still beguiled him on; and in each soft sighing of the breeze, he expected to hear the voice of Alonzo. But when day succeeded day, and he gained no tidings of the fugitive—Er-

nesto, even the ardent Ernesto, began to despair.

Spiritless and desponding, he returned to the pallazzo. What emotions did not his presence excite in the bosom of the mourners—emotions that immediately subsided when they surveyed his dejected countenance, and read in the mournful cast of his averted eye, the confirmation he could not utter.

The donna wildly clasped her hands, and yielded her whole soul to grief.—Elvira let fall the tears of bitter disappointment, while those of tender sympathy bedewed the countenances of Rosalia and Laurentini. Deep drawn sighs escaped from the manly bosom of the duca, and imparted to that of Ernesto a pang not less severe. He inflicted on himself the severest reproaches; to gra-

tify his own curiosity he, had unwittingly betrayed the inconsiderate Alonzo into the present dilemma. It is true, he was not accountable for the sequel; nor could he be blamed for the suspicions of Almanza, which had induced him to venture on the belief, that Almerini was the sole contriver of the plot.

The joy that so late had reigned throughout the pallazzo, was now converted into the most dismal lamentation. The afflicted Ernesto, to satisfy maternal solicitude, a thousand times was called upon to repeat the melancholy tale, with the fond hope that each repetition might throw some light on the subject; but when she heard the same unwearied recital, the darkest despair took possession of her.

Elvira, a prey to corroding sorrow,

strove by words to forget the loss her grief perpetuated, and offered to her mother the consolation she stood in so much need of herself; but the amiable effort proved unsuccessful, as did the sincere and friendly condolence of Rosalia and Laurentini.

Rumour had conveyed to the ears of Viralva the grief of the Almerini family, and he came to sympathise with them. It was now his mean soul felt exultant triumph, as he marked the changed features of the venerable duca.

Low sunk with grief, the once cheerful Ernesto appeared sad and disconsolate. Altidore started as he beheld him; perhaps it was at the alteration his countenance had undergone.

The blooming cheeks of Rosalia were stained with tears, and the eyes of Lau-

rentini dim with weeping—those eyes whose scornful glance had bespoke the contempt she held him in.

The anguish of Donna Almanza and Elvira excited no other sensation than that felt by the selfish, who, unhappy themselves, experience a pleasure in seeing others equally so.

"The virtuous too, have their sufferings," said he, mentally. "Then where the difference between them and me? Where their boasted privilege—that happy exemption from care?" And a smile passed over his fine features, perhaps at what he had been thinking; but this he tempered with a look of sympathy—with such a look as easily deceived the unsuspecting Almerini. He had not learned dissimulation's arts; he had not learned the necessity of disguising the feelings—of professing

friendship, while inward enmity was cherished. He knew not how to gild the dagger of revenge with deceitful smiles; he was unequal to the conflict. What wonder then if he escaped not without a wound.

Donna de Almanza seriously indisposed, returned with Elvira to her castello.

The blooming daughter of Rameraz apprised of her arrival, prepared to meet her; a modest blush her cheek suffused, and buoyant hope high swelled her bosom.

"What means this loitering step—that averted look?" said she, mentally, while a dreadful foreboding prepared her for the catastrophe. "Why see I not Alonzo?" said she, almost unconscious to the trembling Elvira.

A flood of tears was the only reply.

"Then he is dead!" exclaimed she, with an emphatic pause, and sunk insensible into the arms of her father.

The aged warrior greatly agitated, supported her inanimate form.

With difficulty she was restored to life; and when undeceived by Elvira, accused her of deception. "Alonzo is indeed dead, and I am not suffered to mourn for him!—Cruel kindness! Will you not tell me, Elvira?" said she, with a look of the most heart-piercing earnestness.

At length, convinced that her fears were without foundation, she became calm, and listened with composure to the assurances of Elvira; and as her

cursions to the forest. It was in one of those fruitless endeavours the sounds of voices attracted his notice. He became interested, and drew near to the spot. He was sufficiently close to hear their conversation, and even to distinguish their persons; but soon curiosity yielded to surprise on discovering Rosalia and Montaldi.

Greatly agitated, he attempted to listen.

Rosalia spoke something, but too indistinct to be heard, to which Montaldi replied, "'Tis but a change of captivity, senora; I'm freed from fetters, 'tis true, to be bound in those more strongly forged. Dare I hope for such an honor? Your condescension overpowers me."

"The senor," said Rosalia, "is entitled to every return I can make."

"Sweet sounds! like rays of light they illumine the dark horizon of my fate! Believe me, senora, the anguish of this poor heart is augmented by concealment. Emboldened by your encouragement I have presumed to burthen you with my grief. I could not flatter myself I had excited an interest in that fair bosom."

"Can I forget the memorable day that through your exertions I was set free? The Senor Montaldi shall not find me ungrateful."

"Oh! day of days!—enviable captivity! how light your chains to these I wear! Now I am a slave indeed.—Distraction! Whither am I wandering? I had not thus been presumptuous but for your flattering permission. Forgive me, senora, Montaldi shall not intrude on you his sorrow; a silent sufferer, he will exert fortitude."

Rosalia sighed deeply. The ungrateful sound reached the ears of Ernesto, and filled that distracted youth with the quenchless fire of jealousy. At that instant, he could have sacrificed the perfidious Montaldi to his vengeance, but restraining his indignation, he resolved to continue a silent spectator, and impatiently awaited the result.

The voice of Montaldi became tremulous, doubtless from contending emotions, and with faltering accent, he said, "It is near the hour; perhaps the Senor Almerini may walk this way, and I would not he should be acquainted with our meeting."

"Nor I," rejoined Rosalia, in a voice of alarm; "it would spoil the little artifice I have practised, and unravel the whole."

"Oh! that there should be occasion

for disguise!" exclaimed Montaldi, with impassioned energy; "but submissive I yield to destiny. Go then, amiable senora, nor risk displeasure by being seen with the outcast Montaldi; too much debased to excite any other sentiment, he scorns mere pity. Take back your word—you stand acquitted; Montaldi will not owe his happiness to compassion. Shall it be said he worked upon the softer passions—imposed the well invented tale on female credulity? Forbid the thought, ye Sacred Powers! Let Almerini proudly triumph—let him exultant build his fame upon these ruins. But tell Almerini's lofty son I court a name as high as his—I claim a look nobler than that which marked the defiance he bestowed on me."

He paused, and Rosalia moved by his words, used every argument to sooth his wounded mind.

They separated, and Ernesto, distracted with what he had heard, returned home disconsolate. The conduct of Rosalia greatly astonished him; it merited the severest animadversion. What but love could influence her meeting Montaldi? What but love inspire the language with which she addressed him? The thought was scarce endurable, and burning with rage, he vented forth his grief in complaint.

"Montaldi, deceitful, dissembling villain! why aim at the destruction of my peace? Why boast of candour you do not possess? Secure of your victim, you use the specious guise that but the more securely deludes; you talk of honor, till the duped hearer mistakes mere sound for that pure impulse which had taught you not to act the deceiver. Was it worthy of what you profess, to steal away the affections of my Rosalia—

to sully her fair fame by foul association with one of your character? But before to-morrow's sun shines on your schemes, I'll unveil your hypocrisy; and should Rosalia reject clear truth, and call it calumny, I'll prove my words, or nobly bleed.—But shall Almerini's lofty son place himself in competition with Vincent Montaldi, a disgraced bandit? It must not be.—No, faithless Rosalia, you have proved yourself unworthy of such a triumph. Listen to the insidious accent, and prove its falsity when it is too late; fickle and inconstant as thou art, receive the just punishment of your duplicity. Too well accounted for are the treacherous loiterings of the perfidious Montaldi, and you, the object of his nocturnal wanderings, doubtless made a grateful return. Could I with patience hear that faithless tongue repeat assurances of endless gratitude? Could I, unmoved, witness the throbbing of that

false bosom? Yes, yes, I could.—Cease, oh! my heart, nor burn with a flame so ignoble; memory blot out the keen remembrance that once I loved. Teach me, insulted pride, and wounded honor—teach me, I say, to hate her name, to hate Rosalia.—Impossible! And why this weakness? Sure it is unbecoming. I'll pluck this passion from my bosom—blot out each tender impression.—Amiable Di Bartolo, unprepared for the blow, how will your firmness sustain the rude shock—a shock that aims at the root of your affection? Will it not sink you? Oh! yes, it will. Who shall support you—who offer consolation? Can friendship's voice, can eloquence itself still the complaint that mourns the loss of a daughter? Alas! too well I know your parental love, your tenderness, ill fitted for a trial so severe. Not less poignant is my anguish. Disappointed in my high cherished hopes,

where shall I seek a resource? Suspicion will mar all joy. If Rosalia is false, shall I trust to the human countenance? If one so fair, so beauteous, so seeming innocent, can deceive, shall I not suspect every individual? Ah! the whole world."

Finding it vain to court balmy sleep in the present disordered state of his mind, Ernesto threw himself in a chair, and to calm his perturbation, opened the window.

Soon he owned the sweet influence of the reviving breeze; the gentle zephyr, as it slightly agitated the tall majestic trees, refreshed his senses, and soothed his melancholy. He directed his eyes toward the star-bespangled sky, and with meditative look, watched the light passing clouds, as they moved excursive over heaven's clear azure.

The silver moon, with bright refulgence, shed her strong rays, and shone resplendent. Each object borrowed a deeper shade, and fancy's imagery assumed a more impressive cast. Each soft cadence that night's solemn stillness renders distinct, added to the attraction of the pensive scene. The rustling leaves, and the lengthened murmurs of sad echo whispered peace to the bosom of Ernesto, and lulled his sorrow to repose; the passions becalmed, were succeeded by harmony, and banished from his memory corroding care.

## CHAP. XIII.

Soft were the dreams of the slumbering Rosalia, while light fancy with magic spell, held fast the captive senses. Awoke from the pleasing visions, she cheerfully arose, and unconscious of the storm she had raised, looked serenely calm.

The countenance of Ernesto, like the lowering cloud, bespoke the tempest that cast a dark shade over her lovely features. His angry and averted looks surprised her, and when his eyes ac-

cidentally encountered her's, they shot the quick fire of indignation.

Confused and abashed by his strange manner, Rosalia was guilty of almost inconsistency, wishing to appear indifferent.

Ernesto remarked her conduct. "It is the effect of consciousness," thought he, as with seeming carelessness he noticed her meeting with Montaldi.

"Yes, I by chance met the senor," replied she, deeply blushing as the cause of Ernesto's anger revealed itself.

"Chance," he retorted, "often favours our wishes."

On the word wishes, he laid a pointed stress, that again called the mantling colour into the cheeks of Rosalia.

Laurentini strangely interested, would fain have enquired into every particular relative to Montaldi, but fearful of betraying herself, she ventured not to pronounce his name, and with trembling anxiety looked toward Rosalia for the explanation she hoped she would give. Her look was rightly interpreted, and Rosalia, struggling with contending emotion, entreated her forgiveness.

"Undoubtedly," said she, "you will accuse me of secresy, but for the communication I withheld, I had a powerful motive, and such an one I trust, that when explained, will acquit me. Convinced of my Laurentini's goodness I am not afraid she will place an invidious construction on my conduct."

At the concluding sentence she fixed her eyes on Ernesto; he understood

their meaning, and felt himself reproved.

Perhaps he had judged her wrongfully, but calling to mind the language in which she addressed Montaldi, he considered the whole as artifice calculated to deceive him.

"Has she not pledged her word—that word returned by the haughty Florentine? What was it plighted for? Oh! insupportable remembrance! for a testimony of her love. Too true, I fear inclination would not permit her to accept the acquittal he pronounced. Can I brook such an insult? myself rejected for a robber! Treacherous Montaldi, you shall not escape my vengeance!"

This unguarded exclamation escaped him aloud, at once disclosing his secret

thoughts. Laurentini and Rosalia, both equally amazed, looked at each other, then at Ernesto.

Disguise was no longer necessary after the discovery he had made, and yielding to his feelings, he related whatever he knew disgraceful of Montaldi.

"The unjust invective you have used," said Rosalia, "can only be excused by the error you are in. Wilfully prejudiced, it were a vain attempt to undeceive you. Montaldi merits not your scorn. Be assured I speak from conviction—though contending words should call him robber, this single tongue would refute the charge, and call it vile calumny."

"How highly flattered would Montaldi be, did he but know he had so warm an advocate; designing as he is,

he may safely trust his cause in such good hands; but perhaps he is not unconscious of the interest he has excited in that fair bosom."

His tone of irony recalled to the mind of Rosalia, the very words of Montaldi, which Ernesto was now using, and she easily perceived the light in which he had considered them.

The presence of the duca put an end to their conversation, and prevented the justification she would have made in spite of wounded pride.

Laurentini, not divested of suspicion, wondered within herself what could have induced Rosalia to suppress her meeting with Montaldi; the clandestine manner too—her secresy, and apparent confusion, all conspired to perplex her. "Should she really love him—" Her

heart palpitated and she dismissed the obtruding thought.

Self-deceived, Laurentini had flattered herself that Montaldi was an object wholly of indifference to her, but her present emotion, while it revealed the truth, that his memory was still dear, convinced her how ineffectual had been those struggles which she had hoped were successfully maintained; her fortitude completely shaken, left her a prey to the most violent grief.

Ernesto, with the utmost disquiet, passed the remainder of the day in a state of irresolution; he hardly knew how to determine, his immediate idea was to chastise the insolence of Montaldi; but from this prevented by the uncertainty of where to find him, he resolved on adopting other measures.

"I will not act premature, I will first see him, converse with him, and if possible, give him an opportunity of justifying himself; I know that evil, jealousy, I know its magnifying qualities; it can encrease trifles till their importance become indeed formidable. Oh! fatal passion! the destroyer of peace! In that bosom by whom it is cherished, how can you prejudice and bias the soundest judgment! convert friendship the most sincere into inveterate hatred—divide affection—and augment despair! Too many victims to your destructive power already mourn that attendant, credulity; which against reason induced them to receive your mere whisperings as authentic facts; your sly insinuations destroy confidence, and give to every action a false interpretation. I will not hastily condemn Montaldi; in spite of appearance he may be guiltless."

This solacing reflection was sufficient of itself to restore him to tranquillity, but then came the unwelcome conviction that Rosalia had defended him with more than common interest.

"Oh! wilfully blind!" exclaimed he, "How can I doubt—doubt that my misery is complete? Rosalia loves him, and I am undone!"

Unable to support the poignancy of his feelings, he once more resolved on seeking satisfaction from Montaldi, and influenced by this motive, repaired to the forest, but he beheld him not.

"He avoids me," said he mentally; "perhaps he has already received some private intimation of my intention; he shall not however escape me."

Scarce had he indulged this thought

gain her confidence he has imposed some deceptious tale.—'Inspire me with energy to burst asunder those disgraceful bonds.'—He doubtless alluded to his infamous vocation. He will perhaps fain a resignation, to gain her good opinion —the good opinion of Rosalia di Bartólo! intolerable idea! insufferable insolence! And shall I tamely submit to this insult? No; by all the tortures that wreck this heart; by jealousy, the lover's hell—the wretch's torment, he shall not escape me. Before yon bright stars another nightly course have run, this arm shall decide my fate—shall prove my claim; or if by superior power subdued, I'll resign all pretentions, and mourn the foul disgrace."

Finding it vain to seek repose, he spent the night in watching the waning moon, and as that luminary became overshaded with clouds, fancied it bor-

rowed the hue from his destiny; but soon his thoughts assumed a bolder turn, the mist dispelled displayed night's radiance, a mournful smile passed over his features.

"Inured to change," said he, "no more shall it delude; silent and unseen I'll vent my grief, like yonder stars, who move in subservience and shed their feeble rays to encrease splendour; if one should diminish, or perchance become obscured, it would escape observation. Happy state, exempt from vulgar gaze! Curiosity, the misapplied name for sympathy, like the keen probe, lacerates the wound it feigns to cure."

And now he beheld the blushing morn, like modest merit, breaking through the impervious shade, and as dawning hope, surmounting each opposing cloud; the struggling dark com-

pelled to yield, owned the superior influence, and withdrew its obscuring power. Ernesto hailed the eventful morn, and with measured pace, descended from his chamber.

Acclamations of mingled surprise and distress assailed him; Rosalia was no where to be found!

He met the enfrenzied look of her distracted father, tears gushed from his eyes at the heart-piercing sight. Convulsed with grief, Laurentini was unable to speak, and looked the spectacle of woe. The duca, not less affected, made fruitless attempts to offer consolation; this dreadful calamity had indeed deprived him of fortitude. But what were all their united feelings to those of Ernesto? The perfidy and insolence of Montaldi conveyed not a pang half so severe as did the deception of Rosalia!

it penetrated his very heart, lacerated his bosom, and reduced him to the lowest ebb of human despair. Completely powerless, he was incapable of acting; each confused and unconnected thought betrayed the disorder of his mind, and seemed to threaten a loss of reason.

Awakened from his stupor by the anguish of the Senor di Bartolo, he aroused himself from the state of soul-subduing apathy he had fell into—he strove to appear resigned, and abated the violence of his grief.

The fears of Laurentini had now arrived at confirmation; that conduct which she had trembled even to impute to Rosalia, this fatal event proved her guilty of, and the afflictive truth shocked her not more than the evidence it gave of her unworthiness. The culpa-

ble Montaldi escaped not her severe censure—readily could she have forgiven her own disappointment, terrible as it was, but the disgrace of her cousin—the misery of Ernesto—and the sorrow of her uncle, were ills not easily pardoned. The mortification attendant on the conviction that our affection has been bestowed on an unworthy or insensible object, is not half so keen as that which Laurentini felt when she reflected on the disguise of Rosalia.

"And could she thus willingly renounce her relations?—Unite her fate to an unknown being? Too venturesome Rosalia, may not the tear of regret witness your contrition when that contrition is unavailing? Montaldi has deceived you."

Then calling to mind the favourable opinion she had once entertained of him,

her animadversions were less severe, and resentment disarmed became converted into pity.

With unsuccessful endeavour the fugitives were pursued, but no trace could be discovered of them.

"'Tis like the disappearance of Alonzo," said the duca, overpowered by the recollection.

This remark recalled that unfortunate youth to their memory, and excited the sigh of sympathy at his uncertain fate.

Alonzo, on the eventful night alluded to, with the utmost impatience, reached the forest. Scarce was he there, when in spite of the almost impenetrable gloom, he discerned a person walking with hasty strides; they mutually seemed to observe each other. The

figure advanced, and saying in a low voice,

" Your punctuality pleases me," beckoned him to follow. Alonzo's pulse beat quick—unmindful of danger he did as he was bid. It was too dark to distinguish the features of his conductor, who seemed to labour under a similar disadvantage; for he several times attempted to survey the countenance of Alonzo.

In silence they proceeded through the intricacies of the forest; and the varying colour of Almanza witnessed the failure of his courage: he began to suspect treachery, but confided his fears to his own bosom.

Three men rushed from behind a covert, where they had been concealed, and seizing Alonzo by the arm, placed

a bandage over his eyes, and prevented him from making resistance, had he been so disposed, which was not the case; for that infatuated young man, self-deceived, only considered his wishes the nearer their completion—and under this persuasion quietly submitted. In this uncomfortable manner he walked, or rather was dragged along.

Arrived at a building, the men made a signal, which was instantly answered, and admittance given them.

Alonzo was conducted along several winding passages, and passed through many rooms, as he concluded by the opening and shutting of doors. He heard the sound of several voices, apparently in deep conversation, and consulting with each other.

His feelings at this juncture were not

very enviable; for he began to suspect he had been the dupe of artifice.

A rough voice bid him take care, for he had to descend some stairs that were very steep; and immediately he felt the truth of the assertion.

Weary and fatigued, they halted at a landing place; and Almanza remained for some time in a state of the most dreadful suspense. He seemed alone; but of this opportunity he could not take advantage, being deprived of sight, and the use of his hands.

Unable even to conjecture where he was, or for what purpose brought there, he could only wait with patience for a sequel that promised no very favourable termination.

A loud, but pleasing voice, as it issued

from a door, that by the draught of air, seemed a-jar, in reply to some questions asked, said—" Any where for to-night, till we know his further pleasure."

Immediately his former conductor led him down a flight of narrow tottering stairs, and taking a key that hung suspended to his belt, unlocked the dungeon door—for such the shivering sensation that now took possession of Alonzo, convinced him it was; nor were his conjectures wrong.

Removing the bandage from his eyes, and releasing his arms, the man drawing a chain that fastened a lamp to the ceiling, lit it, and saved the unfortunate Almanza from the horrors of darkness.

After this act of stinted kindness, he

turned the lock, and left him to deplore at leisure his own credulity, and the fatal acquiescence of Ernesto.

At a loss to know to whom he could impute his misfortune, his sufferings were the more acute. The whole it seemed, was a snare to inveigle him, but who could the artful contriver be? He had not an enemy! and none but one of the most inveterate kind would have devised so abominable a scheme.

In vain he deplored his fate—a fate augmented by the most torturing suspense—What must be the anxiety of Ernesto and the Almerini family, when acquainted with the disaster.

Ernesto, he feared, would consider himself the cause of his misfortune. "But did you know, generous friend, that Alouzo acquits you, and blames only

himself, your sympathetic bosom would be spared a pang. I wronged by unjust suspicion, the amiable Agatha, and should consider my punishment highly merited, were I the only sufferer. But what contrition can atone for the misery I have doubtless caused my mother and sister. Begone tormenting reflection! To think of them imparts madness, fills me with distraction.

"Oh! dreadful thought, too big for utterance," exclaimed he, as with enfrenzied look he surveyed the loathsome dongeon in which he was confined.

It was of vast extent; the glimmering light emitted from the dimly burning lamp scarce served to penetrate the gloom which involved the extremity, and Alonanza, awed by the death-like silence that prevailed, dared not venture.

The hope of liberty animated him; "and yet the thought is vain," said he mentally.

"Too well secured, my unknown enemy has guarded against an escape." At that instant the lamp which had inspired the fond idea, became extinguished, from long disuse, and damp.

Involved in total darkness, he felt keenly all the horrors of his situation.

Now busy fancy began her work, and imaginary fears conjured up supernatural horrors. Phantasy usurped the dominion of reason, and filled the mind of Alonzo with the most extravagant and chimerical ideas.

The very air seemed impregnated with evil; each gust infused an additional terror—against conviction he imputed

the extinguishing of the lamp to some secret and invisible power. He considered it the forerunner of mischief, and consequently was on his guard.

But the painful reflection that he was powerless, and deprived of every weapon of defence, drove him to desperation. He clenched his fist, struck his forehead, and did all that the darkest despair could suggest.

"Who is it that thus persecutes me?" ejaculated he, in a voice that made the vaulted roof re-echo.

The lengthened sound caused him to shudder. He trembled with dreadful apprehension, expecting every moment would be his last.

He almost fancied he heard voices, and started at the least sound. But Al-

manza was only to suffer from unreal terror, for no intruding footsteps disturbed his distracted reverie.

In the morning, for such he concluded it to be by the lapse of time, the door of his prison was opened, and the person who entered called to him in a voice of mingled fear and amazement, probably excited by the circumstance of the lamp not being alight, he thought he had escaped.

Relieved from this anxiety, by the reply of Almanza, who acquainted him with the fact, he closed the door, promising to return immediately.

During the interval of his absence, Alonzo unsuccessfully tried the lock, thinking in the hurry he might have neglected to secure it. Hearing approaching footsteps, he desisted.

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urveyed the countenance of the
an—there was nothing in it, either to create terror, or excite confidence. It was perfectly unmeaning, and whatever his passions were, made not the least betrayal. A circumstance that increased the mortification of Alonzo, for he had flattered himself with success.

While this was passing in his mind, Jeronymo, (the man's name) intent on his errand, observed not his scrutiny.

"I dare say, senor, you did not rest very comfortable last night."

The tone was that of good nature, and Alonzo replied according.

"Well," returned Jeronymo, that shall be rectified. Our capitano has returned home, and he will lodge you more commodious, or I am much mistaken; for Caprana is no niggard."

This at once revealed to Almanza the situation he was in—he had fell into the hands of banditti; but it was evident through the instigation of some private enemy.

Content with plunder, the freebooters had not detained his person; and the singular manner bespoke premeditation.

The three men appeared the colleagues of the first, and seemingly they acted in conjunction.

"For what purpose was I brought here?" was the question he unceasingly asked himself—a question he was unable to resolve, and uncertainty added to his misery.

Had he knowingly injured any human creature, he would not have been at a loss for an object to ascribe his sufferings; and though for a moment under the baneful influence of jealousy, he never harboured the injurious thought, that Agatha had inflicted the dreadful punishment.

Yet what could authorise the words of the stranger? He hinted at deception, and from that impresssion demanded a meeting: he desired him to come unattended—he had complied with the request, and what was the result?

"Danger unknown," said he, in a voice almost choked with contending passion.

## CHAP. XIV.

JERONYMO, by the same way conducted Alonzo to a large spacious hall. Every thing bore the aspect of order, neatness, and, I had almost said, elegance; he beheld a set of men, whose features were as various as the passions that marked them. Three of whom particularly attracted his notice by the singular resemblance they bore to each other; and these three were brothers, as Caprano, (the capitano) informed him, apologising at the same time, for the ill treatment Almanza had received.

"Myself, and the Senors Ferdinand, and Rhinaldo," said he, pointing to his brothers, "were unfortunately absent, or you should have been better accommodated."

Alonzo bowed, and he continued—

"Whatever alleviation it is in our power to afford you, be assured shall not be withheld. To soften, and not augment human misery, is our wish. I observe your surprise, and can only say, it is an emotion our appearance is calculated to excite. Ill treated by the world, we have boldly dared to differ; and I will tell you wherein we are what we seem—we offer sanctuary to those whom misfortune or antipathy have disgusted with mankind. Honour is the only code of law that binds us, for unless that is duly observed, we

should be making daily infringements on each other's property.

"I perceive your astonishment at the stress I lay on the word honour! With us it is reduced to a principle of self-love—for each act of oppression excites the spirit of revenge or retaliation; and however in some it becomes suppressed through fear or circumstance, the oppressor rarely escapes punishment.

"An oath once given, we never forfeit, not from a moral or religious motive, but from a system of self-preservation.

"We therefore pay an interested obedience, lest the object suffering from our betrayal should punish with severity our infidelity; and withal we favour not treachery. It is true, the

claims of humanity we are seldom called upon to satisfy, for few seek our desolate and secret abode. We have then a far better excuse to our own heart than many, who, blest with every comfort, deny to the child of indigence the smallest share.

" Passion, that arbitrary monarch, who rules with sovereign sway over all mankind, alike influences each individual.

" The charm of variety is his; and the man who most contemns his power, will be found indulging some one favourite or fondly cherished passion. He who practises not the many, will be found censuring him who yields indiscriminately.

" The being that is generous reproachees him that is sordid; and what-

ever particular vice we are not found guilty of, that becomes the object of our animadversion. But these trifling remarks prevent you from taking refreshment.

So saying, he led Alonzo to a well spread table, telling him to consult only his appetite.

Almanza required no other invitation, for since his confinement he had not tasted a morsel.

The repast finished, Caprana pressed him to drink some wine, to which he urged him by praising its flavour and excellent quality, but Alonzo needed no other recommendation than inclination.

Soon he owned its generous influence; it re-animated his drooping spirits, and cheered his sinking frame.

Caprana pledged him, and drinking confusion to his enemies, was struck with astonishment when Alonzo replied, he had not knowingly an enemy.

"Then of what are you accused?" demanded Caprana.

"'Tis a question I am unable to resolve," answered Almanza; "but you, surely, who are charged with my imprisonment can inform me."

"No, by my faith, I cannot; I am unacquainted with your offence. I only know that a tale of deception was imposed on you, calculated to awaken jealous fears. Rodorigo, the person selected to deceive you, on the first night acquainted us of his success, and required the assistance of three more, lest he should meet with opposition; for though on finding you in

company with another senor, he requested you to come alone,' he feared you would not implicitly obey, or if you did, some one might be near at hand to punish treachery."

Almanza sighed inwardly as he lamented his unfortunate credulity. Stifling his emotion, he enquired of Caprana, at whose instigation the mischievous plot was contrived.

"An oath the most solemn prevents my giving the information you require."

Alonzo disappointed, remained silent, and Caprana continued: "'Tis impossible also for me to say whether your captivity will be of long or short duration, for of that I am equally as uncertain as yourself."

This last communication conveyed the utmost affliction to the mind of

Alonzo, and not all the sprightly conversation of Caprana could arouse him from the deep melancholy his words had imparted.

The behaviour of the brothers was courteous and conciliating, and that of the other men, if not familiar, marked with a reserve yet more pleasing; but one among the rest, most claimed his attention. His figure, that once had been elegant, was now almost obscured by neglect, and the disorder of his dress betrayed the confused state of his mind. Deep and sullen despair stamped with gloomy severity his countenance; the contraction of his brow added sternness to the fierce glances of his expressive eyes, and repulsed all advances toward intimacy; his voice was harsh, discordant, and jarring; and his manners displayed a decided singleness of character that excited an interest in the bosom of Alonzo,

which he could not forbear expressing to Caprana.

"The Senor Nicolo," said he, "is a sufferer from the foulest treachery that e'er stained the human character. A miser of his sorrows, he rarely associates with us. He has been a prisoner for many years, and with very little hopes of regaining his liberty; estranged and unsocial, in silence he passes the livelong day, and has often expressed himself, that but for the hope of revenge, he would not survive his misfortunes."

The communication of Caprana increased the curiosity already felt by Almanza, and he longed to become acquainted with the sorrows he felt every inclination to sympathise with, but the unrelaxed austerity of Nicolo forbid every overture. The misery of his own situation was forgot amid solici-

tude to know more of that singular being.

Caprana one day seeing him unusually dull, said, "I am not at all surprised, senor, at your visible dejection; it is so when first we experience treachery, but frequency begets callosity, and the repeated wound is robbed of half its poignancy. Myself and brothers are now smarting from the ingratitude of mankind; but as suffering is the lot of humanity, we endeavour to appear cheerful, and scorn the weakness of complaint.

"It is selfish to burthen the bosom of friendship with our grief, and equally as unwise to satisfy mere idle curiosity; but some are so weak and imprudent, that they, unasked, relate their distress to every one who will pay the least attention. If the relation of our history

will while away the passing hour, it will even prove of more utility.

"Suffice it to say, our father was a man, if not of an independent fortune, at least blest with competence to cultivate the mind. He considered laying up a treasure, far preferable to riches. My mother, a woman of an easy obliging temper, paid the most implicit obedience to his wishes, and rarely disputed them. Possessed of an excellent heart, she constantly followed its dictates; it taught her universal good-will to the whole world, and in the exercise of the pleasing task, she closed a well spent life.

"Mine was the misfortune to possess a heart, alas! too susceptible; its presumptuous wishes felt not restrained by circumstance. I dared aspire to the love of the Senora Seraphina de Alvarado; she was the only daughter of the

Marquis Alvarado, a nobleman, haughty, avaricious, and insufferably arrogant.

"The tender pasion inspired by the irresistible charms of the lovely Seraphina, would have become repressed in a being less ardent than I was, but my love increased in proportion as insurmountable difficulties seemed to threaten an inseparable barrier to my felicity.

"The marquis and marchioness, parsimonious to a degree, had retired to Alvarado Castle, where they passed their days in cheerless solitude. Few were the guests that visited them; Alvarado could not enjoy the social intercourse of friends, therefore domestic joy he never knew.

"With such parents, Seraphina could not fail of being unhappy; but to a natural vivacity, she added the most he-

roic fortitude, and suffered not her spirits to become depressed.

" Edelfrida, the daughter of Count Bertram, was the only friend parental restraint permitted her to have. From a similitude of sentiments they were firmly attached to each other. Many a tedious hour has glided delightfully away in the joys of unfeigned esteem. What grief, let it be ever so poignant, cannot friendship assuage? And these amiable friends were proofs of this assertion.

" To be honoured with the good opinion of Count Bertram was at once the source of all my pleasure and my pain, for it was at his castle I first beheld Seraphina. The very first meeting proved fatal to my repose; my bosom laboured with a hopeless passion.

" Denied of all access to the object of my wishes, save when I accidentally met her at Bertram Castle, I yielded to the darkest despair. Ineffectual were all the efforts of reason; in spite of its prudent whisperings, I still indulged hopes of success, for which however there seemed very little probability, my pretensions to favour being so slender; but Seraphina, above sacrificing love at the shrine of wealth, remained not insensible to the tender impression she had inspired. Oh! can I ever forget the moment of rapture in which I heard her sweetly harmonious voice make an ingenuous acknowledgment that I was not an object of indifference to her?

" On my knees I thanked her for her condescension.

" ' Rise, Caprana,' said she, ' unless you wish to pay homage to riches; but

leave that for the sordid.' And an expressive sigh heaved her gentle bosom. She perceived her words perplexed me, and immediately explained their meaning.

"If I loved before, I now adored, and could not conceal the unspeakable gratitude her conduct excited.

"Edelfrida at that instant entered, and interrupted our interesting conversation; but that amiable girl, on being made acquainted with our felicity, congratulated us with the sincerest friendship, and used every effort to promote our meetings, which, through her generous contrivance, were very frequent.

"At length I revealed my passion to the inexorable marquis. He heard the avowal with a mixture of supercilious pride and haughty indignation, perhaps

excited at my temerity, for such he was pleased to call it.

"In vain I entreated, and on my knees implored Alvarado, who was a stranger to the softer feelings; his adamant bosom could not be softened—he felt no sympathy for another's woe.

"With a look of contemptuous disdain, he left me a prey to the most acute anguish. All hope seemed for ever fled.

"What were my feelings on reviewing the insulting conduct of the marquis! Instead of softening refusal, he augmented my sufferings by the most provoking language. My thoughts were not endurable. But it was the father of my Seraphina; that thought repelled my fury, and I quitted the castle, casting a lingering look behind, but my

anxious eyes were not blest with a sight of her I loved more than life.

"Alvarado, with every feature distorted with rage, vented his fury on the gentle Seraphina.

"In vain she besought forgiveness, and made every concession; his wrath was not to be placated.

"Her mother, equally incensed, reproached her with the utmost bitterness.

"She was forbid their presence, and in the retirement of her chamber, had to ruminate on the severity of her fate.

"Deprived of all communication, I resigned myself a victim to despair; not all the eloquence of Count Bertram could reconcile me to my hard lot. In

unavailing complaint, I passed the tedious days.

"The sympathetic alleviation offered me by the compassionate Edelfrida, alike proved ineffectual, though it afforded me a ray of hope when she considerately reminded me, that as the marquis was unacquainted with the knowledge she had of our affection, he would not prohibit the visits of Seraphina. 'Wait with patience,' said she, 'till his resentment is abated.'

"Her soothing advice was my only consolation; it flattered my luckless passion.

"As Edelfrida had predicted, so it turned out; I shortly enjoyed the society of my Seraphina.

"Unable to exist without her, I pre-

vailed on the amiable girl to elope with me. My patrimony, though small, was nevertheless sufficient to procure the comforts, if not the luxuries of life. But what an exchange! Could I expect my Seraphina would willingly consent to it?

"How was my admiration increased when I heard her, with all the ardour of generous enthusiasm, contemn riches, and assert they were beneath consideration.

"With every precaution we concerted a plan that seemed to promise success; Seraphina was to reside with my father, whom I had already prepared to receive her as his daughter.

"The ill-fated Seraphina quitted the castle undetected, and her unbounded attachment for me supported her in the

severe struggle she maintained between inclination and filial affection; an obligation, she asserted, that no want of tenderness in the parent could acquit the child from not fulfilling. I overruled her scruples, and re-assured, her lovely features assumed their wonted serenity.

"Scarce had I congratulated myself on the completion of my wishes, when a strange interruption prevented the carriage from proceeding; I demanded the cause, and to my utter dismay, beheld several horsemen with the marquis at their head; they immediately surrounded us, and the furious Alvarado with haughty menaces commanded me to resign his daughter.

"Drove to a state of desperation on beholding the inanimate Seraphina, who had fell back lifeless in the carriage, I

resolutely refused, and employed every art to restore her, but she revived not, and almost enfrenzied, I besought her father to suffer me to procure assistance.

" 'That subterfuge will not do,' exclaimed he, in a tone of irony; 'relinquish the disobedient wretch or this weapon shall make you,' at the same time elevating a sword. 'If your spirit be not as mean as your birth, and the disgraceful act you have committed, take your ground.'

" 'Never,' said I, 'shall the sword of Caprana be raised against the father of Seraphina.'

" 'Pitiful coward!' replied he, 'I scorn your abject concession.'

" During this altercation, Seraphina still continued insensible; unmoved,

her relentless father beheld her pitiable situation.

"Taking an advantage of my distraction he attempted to drag her out of the carriage, and in defending her his sword became sheathed in my body. I fell to all appearance dead. Enviable fate! to have died in the defence of my Seraphina! But it was not so—severely wounded, I was left by the remorseless Alvarado to perish.

"Some herdsmen passing by, conveyed me to a neighbouring monastery. The benevolent fathers dressed my wounds, and when I was able, removed me to the dwelling of my father.

"Shocked at the mournful catastrophe, he could only sympathise in my misfortune; but had I been the only sufferer, my despair had found

some alleviation: Seraphina, the angelic Seraphina was doomed to a fate yet more severe. Conveyed by her father to Alvarado Castle, her deplorable condition awakened the compunction of her parents; but, ah! their remorse came too late; the senses of Seraphina had already fled. She in a wild incoherent manner bewailed her loss. In vain they tried every soothing art, it but the more encreased her delirium.

"Edelfrida came but she knew her not; her eyes were fixed in gloomy vacancy, and by their unconscious gaze, convinced that tender friend that she was forgotten. Convulsed with grief, she witnessed the sad change.

"The self-inflicted reproaches of the marquis equalled those she feelingly spared, not to augment his violent anguish.

mediocrity, was not disgraceful, my father freely gave his consent, and Ferdinand, never so happy as when in the society of Agnes, sought every occasion to be with her.

"I must candidly confess when examining the countenance of Agnes, I did not only regard mere lineament, but particularly noticed a certain look of dissimulation which a perpetual smile constantly sought to conceal; but to make this discovery you must have been armed with almost stoicism, for never did I behold a set of features so truly fascinating; it could not be expected from Ferdinand, who, deeply enamoured, saw nothing but perfection in the object of his love; she engrossed his whole attention, and occupied every thought.

"The success of a young man who

owed his prosperity to his friendly assistance, at that period reached his ears, and imparted to him the sincerest pleasure.

"The welfare of Carlo was the only event capable of detaching his thoughts from Agnes, even for a moment; but to satisfy the claims of friendship, love was sacrificed.

"Filled with the purest joy, Ferdinand hastened to congratulate Carlo, who with every mark of gratitude, acknowledged his zeal—imputed his good fortune to him—and was not sparing in thanks. When acquainted with the attachment of Ferdinand, he expressed a desire to see the fair object; in this wish gratified, he was lavish of his praise—praise that delighted Ferdinand, inasmuch as the approval of his friend flattered him.

"How often the happiness we fancy secure becomes disturbed by mere casualty. Ferdinand had unwittingly introduced a dangerous and formidable rival; the charms of Agnes subdued his hitherto inflexible heart; he felt she was essential to his happiness, and to obtain its completion, he became unmindful of his so late made professions of unalterable gratitude.

"The faithless Agnes, alike insensible to the repeated assurances of undivided affection she had made, returned his attention, not to call it by the dignified name of love, for either were incapable of that exalted passion; sordid interest alone influenced them.

"Carlo's circumstances were far more prosperous than Ferdinand's; it mattered not through whose instrumentality.

" With the utmost caution Agnes concealed the change her sentiments had undergone, and suffered Ferdinand to remain in an error fatal to his peace. The day to which he looked forward with pleasing expectation, as the one that was to crown his happiness, witnessed the union of Agnes with the perfidious Carlo.

" To describe the despair of my brother would be a vain attempt, suffice it to say it felt an additional encrease by my misfortunes and those of Rhinaldo. Like us deceived, he however received some consolation in the requital of his false mistress.

" Of a disposition soaring and ambitious, Rhinaldo resolved to improve his scanty fortune. The friend and companion of his travels was a youth who, under similar circumstances, seemed alike actuated by the same impulse.

"Nearly of an age, together they trod the rugged road that leads to preferment; inspired by the same enterprising spirit, they rarely differed in opinion, and mutually yielded to each other, so that the pride of neither felt mortified; careful of giving offence, disputation they avoided as the source of animosity.

"Felix, though cheerful and occasionally gay, was nevertheless tinctured with a small portion of acidity; a certain degree of acrimony marked his disapproval of any particular object, and obtained for him the appellation of a cynic: his dislike appeared more the effect of prejudice than of the most discriminating judgment which he certainly possessed. Generous to a fault, the amiable qualities of his heart became concealed by the aversion he felt to publish his own benevolence. His

opinion of the fair sex in general was much too slight to do him any credit, and this was a subject on which he and my brother were frequently engaged in warm disputes.

"Rhinaldo on those occasions zealously defended the fair, while Felix as resolutely supported his hypothesis; complete master of argument, he totally vanquished his antagonist, who had nought to boast but the purity of his intentions.

"Felix was no defamer, and sought not to asperse the female character; he admired feminine softness; his aim was to correct those errors and peculiarities which by some are mistaken for so many ornaments; he wished to banish finesse, a spurious kind of delicacy that imposes itself on the casual observer for that engaging substance, of which it is only

the shadowy imitation. While he allowed women to possess more sensibility than the opposite sex, he ascribed to them a far greater portion of dissimulation, and expressed his disapprobation at their inconsistency. This harsh decision was the effect of accurate observation, and not the result of disappointment, as many supposed, for Felix had never felt the tender passion, and his severity might be well accounted for.

## CHAP. XV.

"In the course of their travels, Rhinaldo became acquainted with the Senora Petrarcia; she was the daughter of an Italian gentleman of large fortune, a man conspicuous for his extraordinary abilities, and his insinuating manners.

"Of the latter the fair Albertina partook; her conversation was irresistibly attracting, and by its magic power, captivated the most insensible.

"Among those whom her charms enslaved was Rhinaldo, her enthusiastic admirer; he made daily offerings at the

shrine of conscious beauty. His devotion flattered her vanity, and though she professed his passion touched her heart, I fear she acted the hypocrite.

"Albertina was the delightful and constant theme of the enraptured Rhinaldo; she the beloved object of his contemplation; for her Felix became neglected, his friendly advice disregarded and even considered obtrusive.

"Felix, chagrined, but not disappointed, made every allowance that a reasonable man will for one who is under the dominion of infatuation; if he felt vexed, it was at the loss he had sustained in the society of Rhinaldo, and he ventured to remonstrate; but Rhinaldo, deaf to all he could urge, pursued the same line of conduct, till checked in his deluded career by an observation Felix made to him one day:

he hinted at the infidelity of Albertina, as an event her altered manners led him to expect. Love took alarm, and to resent the outrage committed against his power, friendship had nearly fell the sacrifice.

" 'I would sooner suffer ten thousand times from credulity, than become the slave of suspicion,' said Rhinaldo, with a warmth he could ill conceal.

" The suggestion of his friend was most repugnant to his feelings, for it aimed at the root of his happiness; to even give it a thought was distraction.

" 'Enjoy your delusion,' said Felix, 'if chimera appears to you a reality, be it so.—But perhaps you are content with a moderate share of affection?'

" On hearing Rhinaldo exclaim with

vehemence he would not share a divided heart, he shook his head and sighed profoundly.

"As he wished, his words conveyed a latent meaning that made due impression on Rhinaldo; he demanded an explanation, which was immeditely given. Like one awakened out of a trance, he could not credit his senses.

"'Suffer me to act as I think proper, and you shall have demonstration; but examine first your heart, and be convinced you have fortitude sufficient to bear the discovery.'

"Rhinaldo acquiesced, and the trial commenced, with hopes no doubt on his part, that it would prove fruitless. Firmly persuaded of Albertina's sincerity, he treated the suggestion of Felix with indifference, determined that nothing

but conviction should induce him to subscribe to his opinion. 'He is reserved and cold-hearted,' mentally thought he, as with eager anxiety he awaited the result.

"Felix, consistent with the plan they had concerted, was the bearer of a message from Rhinaldo. He informed her that urgent business called his friend away, and that as his absence would be uncertain, he had entreated him to assure her of his regret at being denied the bliss of bidding her farewell.

"With a well counterfeited concern, she asked many questions unmeaning of themselves, but sufficient to show the interest she took in his welfare.

"Felix improved the time opportunity afforded him, and made rapid progress in the favour of Albertina. Deeply afflicted at the anguish, her inconstancy

would occasion Rhinaldo, his manners from almost frivolous gaiety assumed a serious aspect.

"His unusual dejection awakened the sympathy of Albertina, and perhaps influenced her to act with more compassion than she otherwise would have done.

"Felix beheld her tenderness, and trembled for his friend, for awhile he hesitated, unwilling to disturb his fancied felicity, 'But shall I suffer him to be deceived? No, that were stinted kindness—false friendship.'

"After this painful struggle, he combated his feelings, and succeeded so far, that Albertina, the inconstant Albertina, consented to bless him with her hand, regardless of her former protestations, and deceitful assurances.

"As the appointed day approached, the heart of Rhinaldo palpitated, for he had been acquainted with the whole proceeding; but who shall describe his mortification, anguish, and despair, when he witnessed the infidelity of Albertina, and beheld that dissembling fair one on the point of bestowing her hand on Felix.

"It was now her turn to be overwhelmed with confusion. How unlike the sequel she expected! For joy and transport, chagrin and disappointment: instead of congratulations, the most bitter reproaches. Though guilty herself of an act of the cruelest deception, she had the temerity to censure the conduct of Felix.

"'My friend,' said he, addressing Rhinaldo, 'will find I am incapable of change, and I trust, duly appreciate the

value I set on his friendship, since it enabled me to withstand the united temptation of beauty and fortune.'

" Here he bestowed a satirical glance on the disconcerted Albertina.

" ' My suspicions (those suspicions that he generously scoffed at) have now arrived at a painful confirmation, and convinced him how unworthy of even a serious thought is that woman, who, fickle and changeable, can yield affection to every new object.—Mistaken word! it is not affection—it is mere caprice; then you will not long, fair Albertina, remain inconsolable.'

" So saying, the friends embraced each other, and arm in arm, departed, leaving the wonder-struck Albertina more than ever humiliated. The ingenuous acknowledgment of Felix, that he was

the author of the whole scheme, while it generously exculpated Rhinaldo from harbouring suspicion, shewed the full extent of her loss, and additionally increased her regret. She had trifled with a faithful heart, forfeited its esteem, and proved herself alone worthy of the contempt her conduct merited, and which was unmercifully bestowed on her.

"The affair, through the medium of Felix, becoming public, the wedding paraphernalia, as so many mementos of her disgrace, was removed from her sight, but vain the attempt to remove it from her memory; there, as a just punishment, was it indelibly imprinted.

"Rhinaldo, not sufficient philosopher to rejoice at a loss, which, duly considered, was gain, could not but mourn his disappointment, and though grateful

for the solicitude of Felix, returned home in but indifferent spirits.

"The distress he beheld was not calculated to dissipate his own, and to give the finishing touch to our domestic misfortunes, our father almost immediately expired.

"Each of us suffering nearly from the same cause, mutually renounced all intercourse with the other sex, wrongfully excluding the whole because a few individuals had acted unworthily—an error to which too many are addicted, who, injudiciously plucking a thistle instead of a flower, injuriously conclude, nay, boldly declare that the garden of Nature is capable of producing nought else.—Egregious mistake! It is ourselves alone that are to blame. Like skilful mariners luckily escaping wreck, we ought to avoid what, through expe-

rience, we might escape; but on the contrary, saved from the storm, we trust no more to the seas—forget their advantages, only mindful of their dangers. For shame on such conduct!—conduct that now I blush to acknowledge.—Solitude begets lassitude, and lassitude the most insupportable restlessness of mind; in order, if possible, to dissipate it, we had recourse to travelling.

"In change of scene, a something interesting presents itself to the most insensible; in strictly attending to others, we become unmindful of ourselves. The politeness exacted by strangers which we willingly pay, by making us notice trifles, calls off the attention, and produces that harmony which can alone render our society desirable; but as even pleasure itself by frequency becomes insipid, and falls short of its attraction, so we become sa-

tiated, and seek a relief in diversification.

"Arrived at Italy, we eagerly examined each unseen charm, till acquaintance with the object rendered it no longer a novelty.

"Selecting out a most delightful spot, we fixed upon it for our future residence; time however worked a change, and called upon us to exert our energy. Expensive living, and occasional losses at gaming, reduced a capital at best but slender. Neither of us followed any pursuit, so that instead of increasing, our stock daily diminished, and called upon us in time to retrench.

"Converting every article into money, we quitted our residence, uncertain what plan we should pursue.

"In a state of indecision —— an-

dered on unthinking, with the whole of our property about us, not chusing to confide in another what we considered safest with ourselves.

"A sudden storm made us betake to this retreat for shelter. Thither some travellers, on the like occasion, joined us.

"They entertained us with many diverting anecdotes relative to their travels, and the storm increasing, sought a more comfortable asylum in the interior of the building, advising us to do the same, as the court-yard afforded only a partial shelter.

"Following their example, we all descanted on the inconveniences of travelling. The ruinous castle itself next invited our remarks. This ancient pile of Gothic architecture was well worthy of observation, and I bestowed on it more than common attention.

"This attracted the notice of one of the travellers, who complimented me on the fearless manner in which I examined each gloomy avenue.

"'Are you not afraid,' said he, 'of encountering evil spirits? Perhaps you invade their sanctuary, and they may punish your intrusion.'

"A smile passed off what I thought was only intended as a jest, but a second declared he heard a rustling noise.—'What light is that?' he exclaimed, pointing at the same time with his finger.

"I must confess I considered the whole as mere sport to try our courage, till I beheld them one and all flying in the same direction. Not relishing to be left alone, I joined them, and soon had cause to repent of my folly.

" The supposed travellers were no other than robbers, and well acquainted with the frightful haunts and subterraneous caverns of the castle, provided with dark-lanthorns, which they had concealed. Their treacherous feint too well succeeded.

" When secure of their victims, they let drop the veil of disguise, stripped us, and had the audacity to ridicule our want of caution.

" This had been supportable, but after depriving us of every thing, they had the brutality to wound us severely.

" Their work accomplished, they fled, and we, dejected and forlorn, with our little remaining strength, crawled on till we could find some human habitation. Nearly expiring with fa-

tigue, we espied the grey spires of a monastery.

"With a painful effort I rung the bell, the porter came.

"From excessive weakness I had fell several paces from the gate. Neither seeing or hearing any one, he closed it again, and had, as I feared, excluded us from all relief.

"Ferdinand and Rhinaldo could not speak; their pitiable situation nerved my arm: once more I wrung the bell, its loud peal again brought the porter. He was followed by some of the lay brethren.

"'Is it evil spirits that thus disturb us?' said he to them.

"The gate opened. I by signs made

him acquainted with our distress; we were immediately admitted.

" Most of the fathers had retired to their peaceful cells; the superior, and a few more rigid sons of penance were yet up. The unusual violence with which I wrung the bell, had brought them to inquire the cause.

" Much time had been spent in conjecturing how we came by the accident, when Francisco, (the superior) with that prompt humanity which was his characteristic, said, ' Let us, unmindful of the cause, seek to alleviate its effects, which our eyes, unaided by humanity, will inform us is dreadful indeed.'

" Reproved, they profited by his hint. In Francisco you forgot the monk, intent only in admiring the Christian; and as the wise parent, who conceals his

partiality for the child of his love, under the aspect of severity; so was each warm avenue to his heart, disguised by bigotry and mistaken zeal. You overlooked mere external form, while the purity of that innate principle which inspired the whole, alone claimed respect.

"Francisco was a rigid catholic, yet he could not behold unmoved, the sufferings of any, even a heretic. Witness this truth—his tearful eye.

"It is true, when under the influence of spiritual delirium, he felt less sympathy for their pangs; but then he considered them as salutary, and this apparent stoicism, was but another name for that philanthropic glow, which embraced in one fold the whole world universally.

"Under his compassionate care our health shortly became re-established—he supplied us with necessaries, and a small sum of money.

"Laden with their benedictions, we left the pious fathers, improved in health, but not in morals; for during our confinement—a confinement rendered more intolerable, by the reflections that suggested themselves. We formed a resolution of retaliating on mankind.

"Tolerably equipped, we visited several of our acquaintance, to whom, without reservation we communicated our disaster.

"Many heard the recital unmoved; others professed to pity, and but few offered to relieve.

" Drove to desperation, we resolved on revenging ourselves on the perfidious authors of our calamity, borrowing of all who would lend us, we purchased weapons sufficient to defend us, and prepared to attack our enemies. With difficulty we found access to their subterraneous dwelling.

" Before we proceeded to the investigation, we embraced each other, and swearing solemnly nothing but death should separate us, vowed to revenge ourselves, or perish in the attempt.

" Re-assured, we boldly proceeded, when a spectacle too shocking to describe, met our view. Resentment disarmed, yielded to a softer impulse; we let fall tears of sympathy, while we contemplated the dreadful catastrophe that had deprived of life so many unfortunate beings.

" They were indeed placed beyond our resentment; death had released them from mortal suffering. Incapable of sensation, they were alike insensible to our anger or pity.

" One part of the tottering edifice owning the all-subduing hand of time, had fell in, and crushed beneath its ruins, the unhappy sufferers. The caverns and many of the avenues remaining entire and perfect, we conjectured, that deceived by the sound, the deluded men had run up stairs to seek shelter; nor found, till too late, their dreadful mistake.

" By the aid of the lamps we had brought with us, we commenced the intended scrutiny. Every thing bore the appearance of hurry and confusion.—We discovered immense treasure, abundant provision, and fire-arms of all sorts.

As expeditious as possible we removed the dead, and then deliberated what we should do.

" Here was a glittering temptation: riches, ease, and security—not long did we hesitate, but kindling a cheerful fire, began to regale ourselves with some of our enemies' spoils.

" At a convenient opportunity we conveyed the dead to the dormitory belonging to the chapel of the castle.—This had not escaped the general wreck, and presented an aspect more decayed than the frail deposit we had brought.

" With as much decorum as circumstance would allow, we interred them, and took possession of our new abode.

" Thither have resorted those whom misfortune or indiscretion, have mu-

tually disgusted with mankind. The gamester, the oppressed, but not the oppressor. Too crafty, they rarely require assistance; too provident to become indigent. It is such who can triumph over the forlorn. We follow not their example, and paradoxical as it may appear to you, many by us reclaimed have re-trod the paths of virtue. Not shut out of society by one false step, they have had leisure to reflect, and pursued honour from inclination.

"Under the name of vice is classed the slightest indiscretion; mere ebullitions of the unsubdued passions.

"'Be more lenient, O ye virtuous—fix not that awful gulph, so shall the cheered wanderer find sweet repose within your domain. For recollect, a man of spirit, though he be contaminated with guilt, loses not his spirit with

the act—he scorns to receive abject sufferance. Denied access to you, he seeks resource in the allurements of vice, and finds it.'

"Dreadful experiment!—it was only forgetfulness he obtained. What is the result? At war with the very semblance of virtue — dislike becomes inveterate hatred, and he who was only a slight deviator, proves a confirmed hardened villain."

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" In form a god;
" His sword he brandish'd with superior grace,
" And dar'd the boldest of the Gallic race;"
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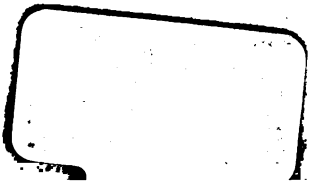
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